

境界界界迷宮 魔術師

BOUNDARY
LABYRINTH
AND MAGICIAN OF
ALIEN WORLD

小野崎えいじ

ONOSAKI
EIJI

ILLUSTRATION

鍋島テジヒロ

VOLUME

1

OVERLAP

境界界の迷宮と魔術師

小野崎えいじ

ONOSAKI
EIJII

ILLUSTRATION

鍋島テツヒコ

VOLUME

1

BOUNDARY
LABYRINTH

AND MAGICIAN OF
ALIEN WORLD

OVERLAP



lang="en">

Kyoukai Meikyuu to Ikai no Majutsushi - WN

Chapter 00-44

Table of Contents

1. [Prologue](#)
2. [Chapter 1](#)
3. [Chapter 2](#)
4. [Chapter 3](#)
5. [Chapter 4](#)
6. [Chapter 5](#)
7. [Chapter 6](#)
8. [Chapter 7](#)
9. [Chapter 8](#)
10. [Chapter 8.5](#)
11. [Chapter 9](#)
12. [Chapter 10](#)
13. [Chapter 11](#)
14. [Chapter 12](#)
15. [Chapter 13](#)
16. [Chapter 14](#)
17. [Chapter 15](#)
18. [Chapter 16](#)
19. [Chapter 17](#)
20. [Chapter 18](#)
21. [Chapter 19](#)
22. [Chapter 20](#)
23. [Chapter 21](#)
24. [Chapter 22](#)
25. [Chapter 23](#)

26. [Chapter 24](#)
27. [Chapter 25](#)
28. [Chapter 26](#)
29. [Chapter 27](#)
30. [Chapter 28](#)
31. [Chapter 29](#)
32. [Chapter 30](#)
33. [Chapter 31](#)
34. [Chapter 31.5](#)
35. [Chapter 32](#)
36. [Chapter 33](#)
37. [Chapter 34](#)
38. [Chapter 35](#)
39. [Chapter 36](#)
40. [Chapter 37](#)
41. [Chapter 38](#)
42. [Chapter 39](#)
43. [Chapter 40](#)
44. [Chapter 41](#)
45. [Chapter 42](#)
46. [Chapter 43](#)
47. [Chapter 44](#)

Prologue

[Prev --](#)

Prologue

VR was completely prospering around this time. The market was swept by popular VR games that had finally reached a level of reliability and simplicity in immersion.

These games were high in demand, regardless of whether or not they were for gamers. There were a variety of games including real time combat nations with Fighters and Brawlers, sports that are easy to enjoy for patients and the elderly, recreational and family activities that can be done between parent and child, and so much more. With this, the genre received a diverse user base.

A popular type of VR in particular were MMOs. The combination of a VR and an MMO was highly addictive. Even if you compare it to other genres of VR, it would be the first one that would stand out.

At any rate, the virtual world was rather vast. This made it fine for those who wanted to enjoy a slow life within the virtual world, or even go exploring. It was most likely that the genre would be receiving a wide range of users for this reason.

Your avatar in the virtual world is created based on your preferences. It's fun to play with other players using a character that's built the way you like. It's something that can't be enjoyed elsewhere.

I am obsessed with the VRMMO 『Break Force Online』like many other people. BFO is a fantasy world with the orthodox use of swords and magic setup, but it's also attractive to various players due to its wide variety of occupations, equipment, martial arts and magic. My avatar, Theodore, is a Battle Mage that solely specializes in close combat magic.

After returning home, I triumphantly equipped my headset and turned the power on.

I was immediately notified of a security alert. It was a warning that there were people inside of the Private Area. Eh? People?

It was one of the functions of the VR headset that had informed me. It would monitor my surroundings, and inform me of any abnormalities while I was logged into the game. Some of the things it would show were, for example, an indication of hunger or a change in body temperature. It even detected cases of intrusions within the Private Area I created, in order to prevent thefts and mischief.

“–Eh.”

When I activated the external monitor with my headset to check my surroundings, I saw that a man had come out of the closet. I locked eyes with him. I think this was an unfortunate event for the both of us. If I had been alerted after logging in...I would have been unable to move my body and maybe the thief would have ignored me when he ran. However, despite the headset being on, I had let out a voice and moved my body, and he had unfortunately noticed me. Certainly—according to what one of my university friends said, burglaries happened often in the neighborhood. The man was holding a kitchen knife and had a look of determination on his face. I had been lying down so I could log in, and he lunged towards me while I was in such a vulnerable position.

“You’re joking, aren’t you—!?”

When I saw the appearance of the man, I quickly concluded that he wanted to make any eyewitnesses disappear. As for me, I thought I was strong enough to resist. If he didn’t want to show his face like that, he should have put on a ski mask. Although he reflexively aimed at my neck, he ended up stabbing a different place. A hot impact ran through the right side of my body. The man pressed the login switch on the headgear and the sensation quickly faded away from my body.

—What I felt first was the feeling of my body being held. My whole body was numb and I was unable to lift a finger. I had no sense of which direction was up or down, and the scenery rapidly changed as I tried to confirm my surroundings. I didn’t know what was what. Suddenly, I was in water and drowning. My eyes rolled up in agony, since I could not swim or breath, and the scenery that had

been moving at high speed suddenly stopped. My arm was grabbed and my body was pulled up. There was a tight feeling on my back. After I was pulled up from the water, I was laid down somewhere. Although I understood what was happening, I did not understand why it was happening.

“Theodore-sama, please hang in there! Theodore-sama!”

A beautiful, blond woman opened her thin eyes...Grace saw my face and seemed relieved. I looked around as I slightly leaned forward. I appeared to be at the town in the territory of Count Gartner. Grace's hair and clothing were wet, so she had probably rescued me from the waterway. There were also unfamiliar adults around who might have also helped me. What on earth is happening? Am I logged into BFO? Is this an event? No, wait. What's a Login, and what's an Event? Am I not Theodore?

I was confused. I think I saw the memory of someone in a distant world while drowning, and now I am somewhere inside the game. I was called Kagehisa Kirishima, and I remember being a Japanese, I think? More precisely, I, as Theodore, am conflicting with a —〇-year old memory. I didn't understand the cause. It seemed that I had remembered my past life after reincarnation, but it was still too early to say anything. There wasn't anything on my stomach that would make me think I had been stabbed. Should I logout and call a GM? However, I couldn't access my inventory, so even if there was an abnormality, I was helpless.

“I'm, fine.”

When I expressed my thoughts, Grace's expression became cloudy again. In order to reassure her, I smiled at her. Grace was a servant of the house of Count Gartner. She was assigned to my room and was one of the few allies I had.

“Hey, hey, Theodore. Are you alright?”

My step-brother Byron said with a grin and a laugh. Next to Byron was his younger brother tagalong, Daryl. Ah, I remembered. Somebody threw me into the waterway. It was probably one of these guys. They kept me company today, saying that they would help carry the bags since I was shopping. I had brought along Grace as my servant. Maybe she was ashamed of me.

One way or another, the idiotic duo Byron and Daryl had come to tease me.

Byron was the hateful, eldest son of the Gartner House. The one who had spoken to me was the second son. I was a child of Count Gartner's mistress. Although I was taken into the Gartner House because my mother had died from an illness, my step-brothers and I never hit it off with each other. Since those guys treated me like nothing since the beginning, it was impossible for us to get along with each other.

In BFO...when making a character, the character's origin was thoroughly established and could be adjusted. When doing the characterization of a character, you were able to change the initial stat values. This had no effect on the Game's adjustment of the character's origin, and although you were free to Role Play if you wanted to in the Game...This current situation wasn't even Role Play. It was undeniably reality.

If it had become a reality for me, whose creator was Kirishima Kagehisa, I just wanted to say "Don't imagine it you guys"...well...it was their own business. It might even be said that my reality was becoming another part of me. Since Theodore was inclined to spend his childhood seeking power, he became a Magician...this was the way that Kagehisa had thought in regards to how he had adjusted the initial stats.

'Well, what should I do now?' Magic collected in my hands, condensing and swirling around as I thought about it.

"You can't even swim. You're becoming a burden for the Gartner house. Try not to get embarrassed about it."

Daryl said. This family disliked every inch of me. They were bullies. As for me, I didn't give a shit about them. Although I had been quiet, with my head down, until just a few minutes ago, I didn't care anymore. I didn't feel any need to endure it.

"...Right back at you. Even if you forgot how to swim, you would still float to the surface since you're just a fat piece of meat."

"Ah?"

Daryl's face distorted and blushed. Had I never retaliated before? Byron also frowned.

"...Hey. Theodore. Do you understand the position you're in?"

It was because they constantly nagged at me every day that I always got beaten for no reason. I was at the bottom of the hierarchy in the Gartner House. I was a mistress's child and had a small body, and although I hadn't been able to act freely at all, there was no need to endure it anymore. If I thought about it calmly, apart from my dad, who didn't hate me, there were very few who would forgive me instead of being violent. If it weren't for dad, I wouldn't have been called to the house.

"Bastard..."

I pointed at Byron's feet, who was trying to leave...and released a novice wind spell, Air Bullet, getting the drop on him.

"!!"

The ground was blasted open with wind bullets. Byron's eyes opened wide and he stopped moving.

"...Bastard, since when did you learn magic..."

Perhaps it was "Just now", if it was previously unnoticed. It's totally from BFO. Theodore was able to use magic because the knowledge that Kirishima Kagehisa had acquired was intact. Although the amount of magic was small, it wasn't a problem to cast novice spells with chants. As for Byron, he only had the confidence to mock people while humming a tune because of his pride in becoming an apprentice knight. The pvp experience of a player was too different.

"If you start being quiet now, I think you'll be able to get along with me."

When I said that, Byron distorted his vicious face. It was better to clearly establish a power relationship with these guys.

"Theodore! You're being cocky just because you learned how to use a little bit of magic!"

Although it seemed that Byron understood to a certain extent, it was apparently still too early for Daryl to understand a power relationship. I picked up a stone and threw it their way. Grace, who was next to me, tried to leave before I threw the stone but she didn't need to worry about it. I grabbed her arm

and pulled her back, then spat at Daryl.

“Beat it.”

Although I had casted an Air Bullet earlier, this time I adjusted it so I wouldn’t lose focus. Rather than a Wind Bullet, it probably felt like a Wall of Storms. I shot the stone that I had thrown earlier at Daryl and, just like that, he flew back and dropped into the waterway. This much wasn’t troubling. The sounds of screams and water resounded.

“Daryl!”

Fumu. Just like the image, I guess. I pointed at Daryl, who was struggling in the waterway, with my thumb and looked sideways at Byron as I gripped onto him and said:

“Now it’s your turn to help out, Byron. My cute, little brother.”

“...I’ll remember this?”

“Go quickly. It’s fine for you to not get involved, Grace. Byron, if you dare to order someone from the Count to come here, I’ll throw you into the waterway.”

Byron gritted his teeth and was sent flying into the water with a splash that resounded in the streets. Well, that was the way it should be when a grudge was returned. From here on, in order to live comfortably in the future, I had no choice but to change the behavior of those stupid brothers. Still, I’m already sorry that we are living together. I wonder what I should do now. I think it’s a waste of time to rot away in such an upright area.

[Prev --](#)

Chapter 1

--

Chapter 1 – Grace's Chain

“–That was a child’s quarrel, wasn’t it?”

The following day I was called out by my dad, Henri, who found me as I was practicing magic in a corner of the garden. He took me to his study. Apparently, Daryl had been clinging to his mother, Catherine, in tears and Catherine had been clinging to Dad, while in tears, as well.

“I heard that you arbitrarily used magic to attack him?”

It seemed that Catherine hadn’t said anything detailed when Dad was listening to her. Maybe he planned to ascertain the facts by having a direct conversation with me. Catherine was probably exaggerating too much. Even if Daryl told Catherine at one point, there is no doubt that the story was being exaggerated. It was likely that he would only believe their excuses, even if I explained it.

“It wasn’t much more than if I had pushed him into the waterway instead. I fired a warning shot at his feet earlier, and even though I threw a stone with the intention of hitting Daryl, it was only in self-defense. Was I supposed to just put up with it instead of retaliating back?”

I didn’t feel like I was in the wrong. Although he thought it was merely a children’s quarrel, in reality he should be cautious of me right now. Since I had a suspicion that Daryl would die if I went all out, I only cast a novice spell. Even if I am still practicing magic right now, memories of the activation process of magic and magical knowledge still remain inside me. I also know how to strengthen it, even though I most likely can’t practice most of the magic.

“But, Theodore.”

“Is it fine if I show you proof?”

"Do you have any?"

I removed my outer garments with a shrug of my shoulder and showed him my back.

"...This..."

I understood why Dad's voice was harsh. There should be several bruises on my back. While there wasn't a large amount of them, there was still an unnatural amount that implied that I was beaten.

"It's not wise to oppose me by using force or violence. Please don't ask me why I did it. I only wanted to defend myself. If you think about what has happened to me before, you would realize that this would be necessary at some point. As for myself, I was careful not to over do it. Since it only reached the level of a children's quarrel, I want to be praised for holding back."

I emphasized the part about it only being to the extent of a children's quarrel.

"...Understood. I'll listen to what Byron and Daryl say."

"If that's the case, listen to your wife instead."

"...Wh, what?"

Father's complexion changed

"Please do so. If Dad doesn't remember teaching those two to behave in such a way, there was obviously someone else who fueled their hatred towards me."

"That...did Catherine directly raise her hand against you...?"

"Rather than her hand, it was her whip. I think there are still traces from yesterday left on my back? I learned afterwards that it seemed to have been tied to Grace's actions. Apparently, she used Grace's ring. I was also slightly amazed when I heard it from Grace."

Dad's eyes widened more. He had recognized that there were several marks on my back from some time ago so he didn't have to check it again. Was he shocked because I said it was tied to Grace's actions? He put his hand on his forehead, as if he had a headache.

For example, she couldn't try to save me or report to Dad about what

happened to me. If the owner of the ring was malicious, they could order Grace to wear or carry the ring with her. To be more accurate, it was a magical artifact in the shape of a ring. Catherine had originally intended to use it to eliminate her weaknesses, rather than just using it to her advantage. In the case of a servant's contract, it was essentially a system derived from magic that was used to prevent things like ignoring orders, escapes, and rebellions. The woman who received the contract entrusted herself to another person and was allowed to blend in and live an ordinary life.

A dhampir...in other words, the 「Owners」 who held the ring of the half-human and half-vampire woman were three people. Dad, my deceased mother, and, lastly, Catherine. Just those three. Byron and Daryl weren't allowed to have it, no discussion. Catherine wasn't stupid enough to give her children too much freedom.

“I'm sorry for not realizing it, Theo.”

“It's fine, since Dad is also busy with work.”

I made an effort of speaking apathetically before giving him an awkward smile.

“What is it?—Don't you have something you want me to do?”

“I'll think about it after you let me live alone. It's an improvement to walking a tightrope while living under the same roof with people who hate me. Wouldn't Dad also be relieved of me, who can use magic? The majority of the servants favour your wife, although Grace is one of my few allies. Honestly, it's been a bed of thorns ever since I came here.”

“...Let me think about it.”

I was a bit worried about whether or not it had gotten through to him. However, this was the time to say all the things I've wanted to say, but had endured until now, to prevent seeming selfish.

“Ah, by the way, my personal wish is to live at Termuilles.”

“Why?”

“I think that there is a limit to teaching myself magic by reading the various books in the study. If it were that place, it would definitely go more smoothly.”

It's a reasonably dangerous place so I think your wife and two sons would also agree."

Dad let out a very long sigh.

"...I had completely forgotten that you are related to me. Theo, that talk about magic...I didn't think you were so eloquent with words."

"I've been prudent. Those guys as well. I didn't want to be hated by Dad, afterall."

In my case, the part about being prudent wasn't quite true. Even for magic, it wasn't like I could practice things like chants with just a small study. The memories from my past life was, at most, beginner magic. Well, let's go with that. Speaking of children, an adult would think that it was natural for children to be delinquents and fight each other.

///

In conclusion, my frank wish got through to him. I'm in the middle of moving towards the Boundary City Termuilles, which is also called the Labyrinth City Termuilles, in a carriage. Dad used a large amount of his funds to arrange an escort, that would normally be beyond his connections, for me. I didn't want to be in his care, since I don't want to be with a close-knit family with him, so I decided to just think of it as consolation money. There was a Gartner House villa inside Termuilles City...but since I would have to butt heads with the family occasionally, I refused to use it. Besides, the price for using the villa touched my nerve.

Dad's acquaintance was there so I couldn't be completely independent. It was better to not be restrained.

Well then. The labyrinth that existed in Termuilles was connected to another world. The connecting path changed its structure with the waxing and waning of the moon...it was a living labyrinth. This was the Great Labyrinth of Termuilles. You could also find valuable treasure that drifted over from the other world if you dove deep into its depths. However, the deepest parts had not yet been investigated. Until now, there was no records of humans ever reaching that far.

It was the same situation as in BFO. Those depths had been implemented in an

update, so even I didn't know what was in the deepest parts of that labyrinth. However, there was less risk on shallow floors, so I think it's a great place to perform experiments or hone your skills. On the other hand, it hadn't been a suitable place for me before the update. Well, it was only a matter of time until I decided to go there. It was, after all, better than living in the Gartner House.

Although there were several reasons that I chose Termuiles as my destination... one of them was that, even if I was a child who could use magic, it would not be comparatively noticeable. Termuilles was a place where various races gathered, in order to explore its labyrinth. Disciple Magicians weren't that rare either, and their war-like spirit was naturally recognized if they were strong. Well, they were fairly good.

"Are you fine with this, Grace? It's a good chance to leave that House and be free."

"I'm assigned to Theodore-sama. After Risa-sama threw me away, I decided to dedicate my life to Theodore-sama. Am I a hindrance?"

Grace, who sat across from me, asked with downcast eyes. Risa, my biological mother, passed away from natural causes. It seemed when Grace had been troubled, my mom had taken her in. Thanks to that, I felt extremely obligated to mom. When I had talked about going to Termuilles, Grace had strongly wished to accompany me.

"No, I don't have such thoughts. I'm relying on you. I regret that I couldn't talk about my magic."

"No, I am terribly sorry for being unable to protect Theodore-sama from those two. I'm grateful that you allowed me to accompany you like this, even with that."

Well put. This was difficult considering Grace's personality. She wasn't suitable for delicate actions like stopping someone, since she was either too powerful or too weak. This was even more the case when I, a child, became an enemy of the owner who hired her. Perhaps the only way for her to continue trying to cover for me was to become a tank. I don't want her to have such a role.

I think it was good that Catherine's group had directed their torment solely onto me and didn't aim at Grace. I wanted to keep her out of harm's way at all

costs. Rather than the bullying, it was related to how I was a self-conceited brat who didn't want to let Grace know that I thought of her as an older sister... Somehow, I felt that such feelings had long been established.

"This time, I'll show you my role. Please allow me to be beside you."

The only one who used Grace's magical artifact was me. The only one who could issue a command to Grace was me. Grace seemed to be enthusiastic about magical artifacts, but only if their restraints were removed. It doesn't mean that I had actually known about that setting, though. For now, shall I ask her what her weapon is?

"What weapon does Grace use?"

"I use an Axe."

"An Axe?"

"Yes. Something like this."

The heavy-looking thing that was dragged out from under the carriage's seat was a double-edged axe called Lábrys. Most of the blade was thick, but its hilt was rather unbalancedly short. A thick chain extended from its pommel. I felt that it was a weapon that is thrown from a long range by using its chain, rather than swinging it around in close combat.

There were unique weapons like that in Japan, too. Is it a two-handed weapon? What I'm trying to say is...it's crazy. Even though she looked like a beautiful and graceful woman, if you removed her limit, she would exert a ridiculous amount of power. That was why she had no choice in it. She looked like an adequately good-looking girl who was bound by a magical artifact, but if she were released, her powerful body would exert the same physical strength of a vampire.

It's unlikely that I will mention something like diving down into the labyrinth...I don't understand her skills well and she doesn't really know my ability in magic, so I can't decide on what to do right now. Since she had brought such a weapon, if push came to shove, she would be brimming with the will to fight.

I was indirectly within the coverage of the restraints. Considering the labyrinth and all, it would probably have been precarious for me to head towards

Termuilles alone. It wasn't just Grace, but also Dad who thought this.

Their impressions of me had immediately changed to thinking that it would be a problem to be overprotective of me, so I couldn't do anything about it for now. To be frank, it was the reason I had given Dad the impression that I had shown a sudden change into becoming a delinquent and losing my temper. It would be nice if the evaluation of me until now was gradually repainted.

--

Chapter 2

G5: Let me know if you like this sentence structure rather than it being full paragraphs every paragraph as it is like this every chapter.

--

Chapter 2 – Away From Home

“Young Master, lunch is ready~.”

Miss Lucian, one of the Adventurers who were hired as escorts, came to tell us since we were in the carriage.

At first, it seemed like the meals had been previously arranged or prepared somewhere else because of the fancy menu, but I was told that it wasn't a hassle to prepare individual menus for everyone to eat meals separately. I responded politely to her, because I'm the son of the Count after all. I headed over while saying how this method was extremely inefficient but nice at the same time. As for them, they didn't expect a noble to say that.

If anything, there seems to be a lot of guys who are similar to my idiotic brothers in this group, so I'd prefer to eat meals separately. For various reasons.

“Lucian-san. If possible, can you please stop calling me ‘Young Master’?”

“But, you're the son of the Count.”

“I'm not that extravagant.”

In fact, I'm a reject of that House.

I certainly am wearing a [Cravat](#) on my waistcoat right now, which could be seen as a noble's clothing, but...it is merely [livery](#) and is too different from what an actual noble would wear.

Still, I was trying to behave, in my own way, because the escorts for this trip were requested by the Count. I should quickly change into a Magician's outfit when I arrive at the Boundary City. As for a Magician's Staff, I'll just have to compromise by purchasing a cheap one.

Well, besides that, it's now time for lunch. The beautiful scenery visible from the gradually sloping hills made one think that this was how one should truly eat a meal.

It was a meal under the blue sky with the escorting Adventurers, led by Lucian. The weather was nice and quiet.

Today's meal was comprised of Vegetable Soup seasoned with salt, Black Bread,

and Dried Meat.

It was wonderful that there wasn't any need for well-mannered dining etiquette. The air and food was delicious, and I had a great feeling of liberation.

The escort Adventurers called themselves the Forest Birds. Everyone who lived in the vicinity of the Gartner House knew them to be likeable. Their vanguard was made up of their two warriors, Robin and Fitz. Miss Monica was skilled in handling a Knife and a Bow. Finally, there was Lucian, who could use both Healing Magic and Attack Magic. Their composition was well balanced. The ratio of men and women was also even. Lucian was rather slow but somewhat gentle. The other guys also seemed like nice people. Although these Adventurers didn't give off the impression of being prideful ruffians, they were certainly skilled.

"Now that I think about it, Young Master, why are you heading towards Termuilles?"

Is what the freckled, brown-haired Robin asked. You too, huh?

"That's why I said to please stop calling me 'Young Master'. I can't handle it."

"I'm very sorry."

"Fufufu."

Everyone seemed amused as they watched me trying to get them to stop. A person's emotional problems aren't something you should laugh at.

"...Just 'Theodore' is fine."

Though, there are also people who call me 'Theo' for short.

"I will be living over there."

"As I thought, you're aiming to make a fortune in a single stroke?"

It seems Monica and Fitz had heard as such.

"No, it's because Termuilles seems rather interesting. Besides, I hate my home."

"I see..."

"Ah."

After answering, they nodded in agreement and I went into a deep thought.

These guys are Adventurers, afterall. They might be constrained on various things but they do have their own thoughts about it. For now, it's likely that they don't think that this job is part of a noble's hobby to make fun of Adventurers.

As for the travelers who were with the Forest Birds, I had chosen them. They had been chosen from members of an Adventurer Group that came to me, saying that they would accept any request. I liked their replies to my question about their motives behind accepting my request.

According to them, it was better to receive money after they reached Termuilles. Apparently, that was the reason for these Adventurers to accompany us.

It seems that they have plans to dive into the labyrinth after escorting us there.

As for the guy who was breathing down my neck, he was an escort hired by Catherine. He was an assassin, which is what I had roughly assumed him to be. The primary motive of the Forest Birds seemed to be to fool around, so I thought that it was safe to be with them. I can empathize with them too.

The feelings I carry for Termuilles might be close to those of the Adventurers who are heading towards the Boundary City. They had a type of devotion to that city, kind of similar to that of people who carry their own hopes and dreams.

In my case, I hadn't really enjoyed my life in Japan.

Maybe it was because society had matured? It was difficult to live and difficult to die...I think that feeling of being locked up was suffocating.

I was fed up with living there. I shrugged my shoulders. It was unreasonable, but I couldn't abide being suddenly deprived of my life like the past me. I will live on my own, without being afraid of anyone.

The journey was relatively smooth. There were escorts present, so weak Demons didn't approach us.

I left watching the surroundings to the Forest Birds and decided to experiment and practice my magic to my heart's content.

Well, it would still be good to work on improving the skills of a Battle Mage by practicing circulating the magic within me, even if it is more effective to train it later.

I don't know how other Magi in this world do it, but, at the very least, I could handle and circulate magic by remembering how it felt in BFO.

“Theodore-sama.”

As I was playing around with the small, expanding magic formations on my fingertips, Grace inclined her head and spoke.

“Nn? What?”

“I’m not that familiar with Magic.”

“Yup.”

“That Magic Formation, I’ve heard that it’s a very advanced skill.”

Aah...is that so? Although it’s a normal chant, it’s disadvantageous to use it in battle. The biggest problem is—it ends up being a rolling fumble.

Having said that, chantless magic is fundamentally weaker. The practicality of chantless magic was limited to Class 3 Magic at best.

I do think that there is chantless magic, to an extent, in the intermediate level Class 4 to Class 6 Magic, but it’s casting time becomes much slower.

In order to overcome those problems, a Magic Skill that draws Magic Formations via magic power was created. Magic Formations allow the reliable completion of magic casting.

There is a big disadvantage in terms of the high mana consumption for magic activation, but there are also plenty of advantages. Although this was usually acquired as a skill for mages in BFO...it was also pretty convenient to those whose class didn’t primarily use magic.

The exceptions were probably the players who either didn’t use magic at all or enjoyed the act of casting magic.

“...I wonder if it’s not that the people who can use it, don’t? It’s not really that difficult.”

“Is that so? I’m sure that Theodore-sama’s magic talent is that of a genius.”

Grace was pleased, just like me, and answered me with a smile.

Well, if I was called a genius, I could only respond by being pleased.

I was making a vague smile when the carriage suddenly stopped moving.

“T-Theodore-san, trouble!”

The coachman, who was seated in the front, called out to me with a panicked

voice. I suspiciously looked out of the carriage's window. Even without explanation, the situation was clear at a glance. Many animals were coming from the highway ahead...deer, monkeys, and wolves, all fleeing.

Goblins, Kobolds, and the like were mixed in as well and also desperately running. It was fairly turbulent and troubling. The horses were swallowed by the flock of animals and were neighing from fear, so the coachmen couldn't do anything.

After confirming the situation, I began to cast Life Detection, an intermediate Class 4 light spell. A shining circle of light was constructed at my feet and expanded.

The spell allowed one to see the light of a living being's aura with the naked eye. Plants, mammals, insects, reptiles, fish, and so on each had their own color, which could be used to classify them.

Fundamentally, more powerful individuals would shine brighter, while it would not work on the undead. Well then, let's have a look.

...Violet Light. A Demon insect. A red radiance vanished as the silhouette of an animal, bathed in violet light, sprang forward. It was difficult to see the individual Auras because there were many of them overlapping each other—A large number of them seemed to be big ants.

A swarm of Killer Ants, huh? Their nature caused great destruction every now and then, and they were, without a doubt, heading this way. I want to forgive the act of training wild animals.

“...There is a swarm of Killer Ants.”

“A-Ants!? And a swarm!?”

“L-Let's run away too!”

Seeing Lucian and the others being restless gave me a tempered feeling. It was inevitable that, having been caught in this situation, they would want to flee. For now, I want to try and protect Grace, no matter what.

“Grace. The ring.”

“Yes, Theodore-sama.”

Grace bit her lips to draw blood before kissing the ring that was held in her

hand.

“–Release Bind.”

— —

Chapter 3

--

Chapter 3 – Battlemage

“–Off I go.”

She said before taking a step. This single step burst the ground open. She flew down the highway like a bullet, holding her axe in her hand, cutting ants in half and tossing them into the air.

Coupled with Grace’s slender figure, it was a rather surreal sight. Grace’s method of fighting was straightforward. She approached with brute force, showing the difference in strength between her and the opposing enemy. Although the weapon’s swing radius could be easily read and its initial velocity was mediocre, if a shield were to receive the swing, it would be destroyed. She easily crushes and tears off an ant’s head with one of her hands. Every time she swings her axe or throws it, ants are literally pulverized. I’m grateful that we’re outside and under the sun, because she gets even stronger at night or when she’s indoors. Her simplistic, superhuman strength well illustrates how much of a formidable threat she is.

Her eyes looked as if they had been tinted scarlet with blood. She smiled as she swung her axe around to her heart’s content—and fangs protruded from her mouth. She had endured a lot at the Gartner House and since her opponent were monsters, she was rampaging as much as she wanted. In fact, there was no need to worry about her if her opponents were just ants. I decided to follow behind you, but honestly, they weren’t even strong enough to be opponents for me.

That being said, this was the first time I was in combat while seeing her appearance.

Holding a long, Magic Staff, I gathered the incoming ants together and, at the same time, expanded my magic. I shot a Fireball at the ants that were dancing in the air. All of them instantly burst into flames and turned into cinders, leaving only ashes behind. If I used the spell, Tornado, the rows of ants within the attack range would vanish—•they would disappear.

Since we were in an open area, I thrust my Staff into the ground. A Magic Formation spread out from my feet and an Earth Lance appeared out of the ground a little further away, skewering a group of ants that were flying into the air.

Well, I could only use Beginner Magic without reserve. I wielded my Staff like a sword and cut apart the swarm of ants with Wind Blade. The selling point of a Battlemage was fighting in close combat with Toujutsu, Taijutsu, and Magic.

There were two benefits to the activation of the acquired Exclusive Enhancement Skill 『Mana Circulation』; the enhancement of one's physical abilities and an increase in the output of Magic damage. However—while Mana Circulation raised the output of the Mana that was refined in one's body, it also reduced its range of use. This meant that it was necessary to train Close Combat Skills with a martial art that gave Physical Ability Enhancement.

High damage, but paper thin armor. It was certain that a player demanding such skills was picky. A normal Magic Class would be able to fill an Artillery Role, but then Mana Circulation wouldn't be activated.

In a duel, other Magic Classes that could acquire long range Skills would probably be declared as the winner.

Anyways...fighting the ants was a perfect way of getting used to this method. There was a lot of them and they didn't know fear, but that was it. They didn't really cooperate with each other, so if you had the firepower to kill them, it was rather easy to fight them.

“Monica! They’re escaping this way!”

“I know!”

The Forest Birds skillfully put up a Defense Barrier and crushed the ants that were trying to forcibly penetrate it. This way, it wasn’t a hard fight so the ants were soon driven back.

“I-It’s over—”

The swarm of ants coming from the forest became irregular and sporadic, until the last one finally came out.

It stopped moving after its head had been pierced by a Long Sword, so the Forest Bird group collapsed to the ground.

Grace and I still had the energy to fight some more.

I also had a way to enhance my physical power with Magic via Mana Circulation. As long as my Mana isn't depleted, my physical strength won't disappear. Having used it in battle, it didn't seem to be a high rank Magic.

The battle plan had been simple. Grace and I were out in front, crushing the ants around us, and the Forest Birds protected the horses and dealt with the ants that were escaping around the sides. That was all.

It would've been troublesome for us to have the surviving horses be eaten. I wanted to avoid any hindrances from occurring on this trip.

That was why I had used the Tier 7 Light Magic Spell, Defense Field, which put up a Hemispherical Defense Barrier. It took on an Attack and a Defense Role by obstructing the incoming ants' movements.

Speaking of which, Tier 7 Magic existed between Intermediate and Advanced Magic. After plainly showing them my true strength by using this, everyone agreed that my strength was needed. It's good that everyone realized that I am an Attacker.

I decided to fight and force our way through if they were unwilling to run away. There was no reason to be scared of something like a swarm of Killer Ants.

“Today...you showed me plenty of unbelievable things...”

“Perhaps I’m a genius...”

...Is what she said as she looked away, trying to accept what had happened.

“Theodore-sama.”

Grace looked back at me as she called my name.

“Please take care of me.”

“Yeah.”

She reapplied the ring’s bind by touching it with her hand. She became slightly unsteady so I instinctively supported her body.

“Are you ok?”

“–Yes. Our opponents were just ants but I got too tipsy and showed you an unsightly appearance. I also don’t feel hungry.”

Grace nodded, feeling slightly ashamed, and suppressed a large sigh. It was just like Grace to get intoxicated by the smell of blood from living animals when her bind was released. I had laughed in the middle of today’s battle, but her nature had probably been leaning closer to that of a Vampire. Grace called this ‘shameful’ and it seemed like she didn’t like it. Although her Dhampir blood-sucking impulses were suppressed by the Magical Tool, her human side still sensed the leftover impulses—In other words, the impulses were converted to hunger.
I looked carefully at Grace’s appearance. Her cheeks were slightly flushed from moving around. The axe that she had been swinging around earlier looks heavy. ...She doesn’t seem to be injured, so if she doesn’t feel hunger from being intoxicated, I wonder if she is fine?
If it has to be done later—.

“Should we sleep out in the open today?”

I looked up at the sky as I suggested this. It doesn’t seem likely to rain so we’re lucky.

“Eh? If we hurry, we can make it to the next town.”

There was a reason that we couldn’t do that. I asked them a question.

“Should we take a break and try harvesting them?”

The ant carcasses were piled up like a mountain behind me. Demons amassed Mana into specific areas, so their raw materials could be processed and sold for gold.

In other words, we had to collect the Jaws of the Killer Ants.

It should be fine. They will be split evenly, so it’s fine to be relieved.

They nodded as they smiled happily. As expected, these guys were Adventurers who didn’t have opposing opinions.

We collected the jaws until the day was over and finished by burning the carcasses.

There was a higher chance of encountering Demons with comparatively bad natures, like Wisps and Ghosts, at night, so we decided to spread out a barrier

until morning.

There were also various things that made sleeping where a battle had taken place feel unpleasant, so we set up camp at an open area further down the highway.

However, Barriers wouldn't affect thieves so we still had to stand guard. Saying that today was special, I took the position of night guard, since I still had some strength, and let the others rest.

Since I had spent the daytime comfortably inside the carriage, this much isn't a problem.

Rather, I really wanted to see the condition of my Magic Staff tonight. During the battle, it had made a somewhat unpleasant sound...

"Hmm."

A small crack was spreading through it. It seems like it couldn't withstand the overload of circulating Magic.

...This is the first time I had been in a battle. As I thought, maybe even a new staff couldn't meet the standards required by the circulation.

"Is there a problem?"

Grace tilted her head and asked when I groaned while holding the staff by the camp's bonfire.

"Look at this."

"...It's cracked. This was a new item, correct?"

"It looks like the Staff couldn't endure it."

It was the thing I liked the best among the items that I obtained while I was in the Count's territory.

It seems like there is a need to replace it, since it wouldn't be strange for it to break immediately if I used the same quality of circulation to cast another Intermediate or Advanced Magic.

Even though I can fight unarmed, I had always wanted to mainly use Toujutsu techniques...Really, I want a better Staff.

"It'll be okay. You will surely obtain a good item at Termuilles."

"Yeah, it'll be fine if that's the case."

"I am also here, so please don't push yourself any more than this."

"...Grace, is it fine for you to release it frequently? Don't hold back and hide your condition for my sake, okay?"

"There is no need to worry about that. There is only a burden on me at the moment I return from that state, and even if I get intoxicated, it is temporary, so it won't last for very long."

Grace tilted her head as she said that.

"Today...somehow it hasn't settled down."

"You haven't calmed down?"

"No. It has already subsided. I don't feel anything unpleasant, so I think it is fine. The state of this condition is also stable."

Fumu...while looking at Grace's appearance, I wondered if it would be like that from here on. As I looked at her decorous face from the side, she was illuminated by the fire's flickering and I somehow directed a joyful smile at her.

--

Chapter 4

--

Chapter 4 – Adventurer’s Guild

“Excuse me, how much is this?”

After examining several Magic Staves, I chose one and tried asking the old magician, who was seated at the store’s counter and smoking a pipe, for the price.

Things like Scrolls, Crystal Balls, Dried Lizard, and other miscellaneous things were placed in a narrow area, giving off the typical atmosphere of a Magic Shop. We had continued down the highway and arrived at a rural city called Shirn. The Forest Birds had said that they would go off separately and do their own thing, so it looked like they were going to sell the Ant Jaws at one of the Guild’s branches.

I decided to go shopping for things and rendezvous with them later, which is when we would depart for Termuilles.

Although they could have heard about the situation from me, they seemed to be prudent. They hadn’t asked about Grace either, so it seemed like only a favorable relationship was needed.

Perhaps it was the so-called ‘Taboo Between Adventurers’, which meant that anyone who thoughtlessly investigated another’s past or situation would be hated.

I think that this treatment stemmed from my story of leaving the House I hated, which led them to imagine various things.

After all, there was no reason to part with a Noble’s House if it was competent.

Although, it might be a rule of thumb that prying into the situation of a person from a Noble’s House will result in annoying situations.

In case I was asked about my combat ability, I would answer that I just remembered most of the things from my self-study on Toujutsu and magic. It was a modest act for Nobles to practice martial arts. It was difficult before I obtained my talent, since there was only one place where I could practice while being given the cold shoulder by Byron and Daryl.

I didn’t want to show the martial arts that I practiced that day to Grace, so I had

refused to travel together.

"Fumu? Ain't that a little too big for ya?"

The old Magician shopkeeper repositioned his monocle and inclined his head while comparing me with the Staff I had chosen.

"I don't really mind it, since I will use Toujutsu at the same time. I decided to replace it, since I'm still young and will grow more."

"Hou, Toujutsu, huh. It's quite rare for someone of your age to say that you have your heart set on Toujutsu in the future."

"I learned about it in literature and other martial arts during self-study. It also pointed out that I could use Swords and Spears for an extended amount of time."

"Umu. That is right...despite saying that it was self-study, you are speaking about it easily. Usually, young magicians tend to attract attention 'cause they are showy with their Fire Magic, ya see."

My mood improved from frankly talking about Toujutsu. It seems that the shopkeeper is also someone who can hold a conversation.

Wasn't it, "a Spear for thrusting, a Naginata for sweeping, and a Tachi for carrying"? These were the famous words of the Toujutsu schools in Japan. Things like Toujutsu's perfection and usefulness were plainly shown by its nature.

I looked around at the many, interesting items in the store before glancing back at Grace. I feel that she is trying her best to refrain from asking me about my situation.

Was it to keep the fruits of our labor hidden? Or had she decided to wait before speaking about it for my sake? Perhaps she believed that, as a servant, she shouldn't investigate it. At any rate, it seems that there is no doubt that it is 'Because I am trusted'.

Though...I think that it is fine to properly talk about it with Grace, when the time comes.

However, I can't really explain what happened very well, so it is still impossible at this stage.

"However, that is something for beginners to practice with. It's not really that good. If you use Toujutsu, I have something more suitable."

"Ah, no thanks. I plan to use it until it is worn out, so will you allow me to see items that are similar to this?"

"Hohou. An enthusiastic practitioner."

Since that wasn't the case, I guessed that the misunderstanding hadn't been solved.

In any case, I had gone and looked at the Staffs suited for Toujutsu that had been lined up on the counter and, although I think that the goods were better quality than the one I had obtained in the Count's territory, it was doubtful as to whether any of them would be able to endure all of my power.

I think that these were made by the shopkeeper, so if I were to say that, it would probably dampen his mood. Even if I didn't foolishly say it, it was honestly a good scene.

Magic Staffs weren't cheap, so I believed that it would fill the gap until we arrived at Termuilles. After wrapping up the three Staves I acquired, I left the store.

"Grace, is there anything you want to buy?"

"No. It seems that everyone from Forest Bird are purchasing the necessary goods."

"Shall we return at once, then?"

///

When we returned to the stable where the carriage was being kept, everyone else had already returned, whether or not they had finished their business. Hm? They said that they obtained various things, like weapons, so it seems that they were quick about finishing their various tasks.

Somehow, the faces I did not recognize had increased. There was a middle-aged man, a young man, and a young woman. The three were wearing matching surcoats over their light armor.

"Theo-kun, this is the Captain of the guards of the Oslo Clan—"

"Nice to meet you. I'm under the care of the Guild. I'm Beline."

Oslo looked like a big-hearted person, and Beline bowed as she introduced herself.

“Nice to meet you. I am called Theodore Gartner. Is there something you want with us?”

Having had to wait for me like this—they probably had something to say. Even though I said ‘no’ to inviting people into our group, it made no difference if the six of us could defeat them.

What could it be? Was there trouble selling the Jaws?

“Fumu. You are another Magician? What is this? Aren’t you just a child?”

“Captain Oslo, that has nothing to do with us, right? In accordance with the Guild, we want to give our thanks for opposing the Killer Ants before a big disaster occurred. It’s a large achievement, so it’s about the special reward being given out...”

“Although the Guard Captain happened to be here, by chance, he wasn’t the one who prevented the disaster, so he is being unreasonable.”

It seemed as if Beline’s words had been passed onto Forest Bird’s warrior, Fitz, who shrugged his shoulders.

“Unreasonable? How rude. You said that the six of them were the ones who defeated the Killer Ants?”

“It is as Oslo-dono says. Please don’t treat us like fools anymore.”

“Putting the reward money aside, they haven’t persisted in anything, right? If they are under suspicion, wouldn’t it be fine to say that their sale amount was ordinary?”

“Saying that they were tried for that alone is a problem.”

“Isn’t it fine if they show us the remains of the burnt ant carcasses?”

“Right now, they’re making us subordinates run around like a horse!”

“The Guild has also sent a number of personnel to ensure fairness.”

When Beline-san shut him down, Oslo smacked his lips.
...Yup. I’ve roughly grasped the situation.

Beline-san is an ally, and a capable one at that.

"First of all...why is the Guard Captain interfering with the Guild's internal affairs?"

I retorted.

The Guild Organization was self-governed, so the portion of the national policy that was left to the Adventurers was rather large.

Although the Guild could freely hand out requests from the country and its people, its existence was convenient for the country.

In the beginning...after the end of the war, questions arose about what the unemployed mercenaries would do. The discussion eventually became about how 'Isn't it fine to use them as a countermeasure against Demons'.

Contrary to their expectations, the Guild was established as an autonomous organization. It was constructed in one generation, to let Adventurers get on with their lives, and the King of the time personally created the Guild as a way to give Adventurers autonomy.

Since Adventurers were warmly received, plenty of talented people gathered. The talented people of his country were also easily invited. As a result, the surrounding nations were forced to follow his lead...and now, it had become standard.

There was a common set of rules that crossed national borders, and the amount of money the Guild paid to Adventurers indicated the standard payment for quests, since it was a mediator for Adventurers. Since talented Adventurers were spread out all over the world, a pact was signed between the countries.

Although the Guild had a strong influence, due to its history of being independent, countries didn't need to be fearful of it so it was perfectly convenient.

It had the twofold result of decreasing the number of thieves and improving security. Since the information of talented people was gathered, the countries could also go headhunting. Even the information of well-known, dangerous people was collected.

Above all, the cost-effectiveness was excellent.

The country carefully examined materials dropped by Demons and compensated

gold spent for requests, so it was fine to pay people for just finishing the job. Even labor costs were managed by a section of the Guild's personnel. Even if Adventurers were injured or killed, they were independent because of the pact and the Country didn't have to take care of them, so they could be used cheaply.

Since the country guaranteed status for an Adventurer, it was easy for them to travel from town to town. There were also no qualifications that were particularly needed, so it was safe to move about to find work and it wasn't very difficult to earn their keep.

With that in mind...it was strange to wonder if the Guard Captain was just meddling with them.

"Regardless of me being the Guard Captain, I'm only trying to kill the injustice, for the goodwill of the citizens!"

"Which is what you're saying. Beline-san, what's your opinion on it?"

"About that, it's because the lord here doesn't really like Adventurers and Captain Oslo is in charge of the security and management of that forest."

"Aah...the Demon extermination appears to be lacking."

"It's this, isn't it?"

When Beline-san put on an evil smile and showed a gesture of slicing her neck with her finger, Oslo's face became bright red.

--

Chapter 5

--

Chapter 5 – Lessons

Uhh, let's try thinking about it from Oslo's viewpoint, since I can't really understand it right now.

After introducing himself, he hasn't done anything...However, depending on what his lord is like, I might be imprisoned if I scrutinize his position while being jobless.

Although there would surely be a Jobless Course if there was proof, if there wasn't, I would trade places with him and take Oslo's achievements.

If that happened, he would have to be stingy about it, so it would probably be... in our favor?

“What the hell, it was lacking to begin with?”

“Aie, the Bar’s security was perfect.”

Aah, this is pointless. Since the Demon extermination wasn't done properly, the abundance of 「Bait」caused an increase in the amount of Killer Ants. Oslo was enraged at the sarcastic Beline.

“Don’t make fun of me, young lady! You said that most of these brats fought with that swarm of Killer Ants? That’s such a load of bullshit!”

Oslo was speaking as if he was on the premise that there was something suspicious being done here. Was that why he came to interfere?

If the Lord found out that a victory was taken away from him like this, perhaps the situation would become dangerous...? Probably. I would understand this desperation if they were to say that I had no excuses for being unemployed.

“In other words, you’re saying that it’s fine if I show you my true power, which was able to oppose the swarm of Killer Ants? Right now, I can even show you Tier Seven Magic, you know?”

“Tier Seven, you say!?”

If I used another Defense Shield, it would probably interfere with the road. What would be good to use, I wonder? When I expanded a Magic Formation on

my fingertips, before I could try to appeal to him by showing them an attack, Oslo widened his eyes, instantly became dumbstruck, and shook his head, trying to pull himself together.

"N-No! Even if you use that as an example, it won't serve as proof that the swarm of ants surged out of that forest! You have to remain in this town for us, until my subordinates return!"

"So...what authority would that be based on?"

I asked him a question, disregarding whether or not he thought of me as a child, as he tilted his head.

"T-That is...naturally, as the Guard Captain!"

"It's not the goodwill of the citizens?"

"..."

When I retorted, Oslo finally became silent, and Robin, who was beside me, seemed amazed.

Since the workers of the Guild dealt with their own internal affairs, I concluded that the Guild had come here to investigate whether they should give out the reward money or if there was any fraudulent activity.

If the soldiers and the Guard Captain wanted to get involved with the Guild, as long as it wasn't a crime, they could come after receiving a report saying that there was something suspicious.

"By the way, in the case of Forest Bird, because they are well-known, even if they were to cause trouble, it would be easy to search for them as wanted criminals. In that situation, it would be the Guild's responsibility, regardless of life or death, to capture them, wouldn't it? Theodore Gartner-sama is the employer...it looks like the identity of this gentleman was well hidden. Though, even if it was impossible for them to stay, I don't think that there is any need to worry about them escaping."

...It seems Beline had completely realized that I was part of the Count's family. Since Forest Bird knows that I hate that family, I'm not supposed to talk about that house.

For Beline to have figured it out, it seems that I shouldn't have given my name?

Even if I guessed wrongly, it was expressed that I didn't promise anything. Whether or not Oslo was also wrong about this, after looking at Grace, who was taking notes on my equipment as well as that of those next to me, his complexion gradually worsened.

Exactly why was Oslo prolonging our departure from this place? I thought that it was possible to show them that we were strong enough to fight the Ants by showing them a Magic Formation. That was why I used that as proof the instant they made a counterattack.

There was already no point in killing them or scaring them away to silence them. They had a purpose beyond the Guild trying to grasp the situation. His position had no influence, regardless of whether there were carcasses remaining in the forest.

...Ah. If we were proven innocent when their subordinates returned, maybe they would conspire and deceive me? Perhaps this whole ordeal with the ant's extermination was an attempt to protect themselves?
If so, I think that reason is convincing, since they had come to make contact with me. However, since the Guild had eyes and they couldn't drop their firm attitude, it had become an overbearing order for them.
If so, was their next plan to try to reconcile so they could soften their attitude?
Ever since I separated from Beline, it's become a tasty situation.

"W-Well, sorry about that. It seems that there was a misunderstanding. I'll understand the situation if all of us talk about it calmly. Why don't we talk inside the stable? What? I won't do anything bad. Hey, you."

He said that in a low, coaxing voice, so that it wouldn't reach Beline's ears. More precisely, it was easy to understand...they hated me, who could read their actions.

It's probably thanks to being too familiar with those stupid brothers and Catherine.

Why do I have to cooperate with them in such a way? Even though I'm helplessly stranded, thanks to the Ant extermination.

Regarding the swarm of Killer Ants, it could have become a situation where one or two villages got destroyed if someone unskillful tried to handle it. If this had clearly occurred from the negligence of their duty, rather than becoming

unemployed, it wouldn't be strange for them to be imprisoned. Although it was fine, since it was prevented beforehand, if that situation had really occurred, they would have been punished, without a doubt.

Uhh, didn't the Lord hate Adventurers? Wouldn't this result cause him to lose face?

Oslo was definitely the one who had accused me by saying that we were unjustified and so on.

Although there were no plans to protect, if I had any, sparks would probably come flying, even if there were no problems with there being room for sympathy in regards to the situation they were in.

"Wouldn't it a little better if I resigned myself and bowed to the Lord?"

"Bastard! Even though Oslo-dono bowed, what's with that attitude!"

"O-Oi, you...!?"

Instead of the superior, it was his subordinate who couldn't endure it anymore. The man who was next to Oslo came over to strike me. Oslo was surprised as he shouted.

I immediately activated Mana Circulation. As my physical power was enhanced, I used 『Waterwheel Throw』. As I diverted the man's fist, I seized his arm and stopped his body with my leg's center of gravity, causing him to lose his balance.

The momentum caused him to cleanly rotate once, and since he would die if he was unskillful, I smacked his ass onto the ground. I concluded that his body couldn't handle it since he had been struck dumbfounded while he was rotating.

"Gohh?!?"

It seems that he was caught by that centrifugal force. Without even being able to place a foot on the ground, the man who had landed hard on his ass fainted from the sharp pain.

Usually, when activating a martial art, one's Stamina and Energy vanished, but in the case of Mana Circulation, Mana disappeared instead. Although this was one feature of a Battlemage, whether it was good to use Stamina or Mana depended on the situation, so I couldn't really say if it was a merit or a demerit.

"You brat! Don't resist!"

Another enemy pulled out a sword from his hip. Here too...? I mean, it had not been likely for this situation to result in fighting with weapons.

When I glanced at Oslo, wary of his reaction, I saw that he had become deathly pale and absent minded.

“Theodore-sama.”

Grace took out a Magic Staff from inside of its wrapping and I held out my hand.

“Thank you, Grace.”

Grace stepped back after I thanked her and, in order to ascertain the sense of using it, I tried swinging it lightly.

I felt a light vibration from the wind being cut at both ends of the Staff. Though I have been saying that it was meant for beginner's practice... Yeah. It's not bad. Although it would immediately break if a large amount of Mana passed through it, since I viewed it as a mere weapon, it was easy to handle its faults. This was the only thing the shopkeeper had understood about Toujutsu. Well then.

“U...”

After seeing me hold the Staff as if it were a spear, the man hardened his resolve. It made him remember that I was a Magician. Although, magic could be used even if there weren't any Magic Staves around.

“U-uoooooooooh!”

Even if that's the case, is it because of that?

He probably couldn't even bear the pressure. Perhaps he thought about making the first move since he was in close range.

He rushed forward while wielding his sword and raised a loud voice. However, the distance to reach here was long. Taking advantage of it, I lightly kicked his jaw from below. He tumbled as I took out his footing and stepped on his chest. Since he was still brandishing his sword with a fist, I trampled him from above.

“Guah!?”

This time, he screamed as he dropped his sword and flipped onto the end of the road. In rapid succession, since I had my palm facing towards the man who had fallen from my technique, I expanded a Magic Formation from the tip of my

Staff.

“Light Bind.”

Tier 5 Light Magic. A ring of light appeared and surrounded the man, almost as if it was tightly squeezing, before it solidified, binding his body. I couldn’t tell if he was part of the Guard Captain’s unit.

“Had enough yet?”

I gazed at Oslo, who had sweat running down his forehead and was shaking tremendously.

Who was the first one to lay hands on the other? This was the reason. The first witness was Beline. The matter in question was whether or not she would become a mediator in the scandal that the Guard Captain had incurred. What had happened to the ants and such wasn’t significant enough to wait for another conclusion.

Oslo knelt in place.

“I-I, what should I do...?”

“So...Isn’t it fine if you apologize to the Lord?”

It didn’t necessarily mean that he was really making a fool of himself. I really think that he was diligent.

It was useless for him to back out of his responsibility over the deserters. It was checkmate.

“Fuh...haha. Why am I so unsightly.”

He shook his head while smiling rather...peculiarly, as if he was crushed. Then, he slowly locked eyes with me.

The impression of those eyes...was rather familiar, somehow. It reminded me of some things. Instead of the present me, it recalled the memories of Kagehisa.

He looked at Beline, then at Lucian and Monica.

He then directed his gaze towards Grace before grasping the sword on his waist. My Magic Staff, which was grasped with a reverse grip, was touching Oslo’s neck and was in a condition where it could release magic at any point in time. Tinged with Mana, it emitted a pale light and a sound that seemed like a growl.

As Oslo smiled, he firmly grasped the hilt of his sword.

“Take your hand off of the sword.”

Exerting myself, I ordered him with a surge of emotions.
Actions that went any further than this wouldn’t be forgiven. I don’t intend to hesitate.

Or did I plan to take him as a hostage, even if he escaped?
His positional relationship with Beline was bad, and Lucian and Monica were Adventurers.

Perhaps he thought, ‘It’s Grace who can’t be seen as an essential member in close quarters combat’.

The easy way to let people die is to kill them. I thought about that one scratch on my right side, that time I was stabbed, and that heat of being revived. I still haven’t forgotten that heat.

Oslo looked up at me with eyes that were clearly frightened. When we met gazes, he narrowed his eyes, as if his mind that was standing at the outermost edge had spoken out to him, and distorted his expression with a smile.

“U.....hi.....”

Rather than giving up, was it a feeling of having your fangs broken? Oslo separated his hand from his hilt, fell onto his ass, and retreated backwards. After confirming this, I also put my Staff away.

As for whether the Lord would give their approval of this later on...I didn’t really have an interest in that. It’s their problem.

Rather, when Grace’s ring is working, I have to think of it as a means of self defense, or a tool. What’s the best thing to do?

After reflecting on it, I heard the sound of cracking wood from my Staff.
It seems that the degree of Mana that I poured into it was too much. Not even one hour has passed and one of them has already become useless, huh.

--

Chapter 6

--

Chapter 6 – The Lord Of Shirn

As soon as the problem with Oslo was solved, we were called over to the Guild Office, who wanted to give us their official thanks.

Along with Grace, we passed through into the Guild's inner room, where tea was served.

"Well, I am truly sorry for that. Though I had thought that they were relatively easy to read, since Oslo's main intention was self-preservation, that subordinate is a guy who doesn't really understand such things."

Beline bowed before pouring black tea.

Although she was the Guild's receptionist, it seems that she came to this town with a backer from a different branch.

That is to say, the backer was probably somebody like the Lord, someone related to the Guild, or someone related to that Guard Captain.

"It doesn't really matter to me. Oslo looked like he had taken various countermeasures that weren't too excessive."

Forest Bird was probably in the middle of shopping inside the town, since procuring supply goods and weapons had been delayed.

"But, I want to weaken my connection with that House. It'll save me trouble if you don't ask about it too much."

"Er, I thought that was what caused you trouble earlier?"

"No, it's not necessarily the case that they know about it."

I thought that there was no problem with them understanding a little bit due to me saying this.

Beline laughed and, with a smile, said,

"About the issue of us troubling you this time, of course it includes the reward money you will receive from us. If you have any other needs, we will answer it to the best of our abilities."

Even though the other person was a child, even if they were from a noble family, Beline's interactions were very polite. Rather, she was not of a low social status.

Since I was an illegitimate child, it probably would not become a problem even if they learned that Grace is a Dhampir.

Grace, is it? Let's try asking about that kind woman's means of self defense.

"Do you know about any skilled alchemists (TN: 錬金術師)? If there aren't any in this town, ones in Termuilles are also fine."

"An Alchemist, you say? Although I don't understand why you want one, if you speak with that branch over there and introduce yourself, I think you will get what you want to know. I'll write a letter of introduction."

"That will save me."

If a backer had sent her in order to solve the various problems that Oslo, the Lord, and the like had, then, as I thought, this woman was rather efficient.

"Beline-san. I'm sorry to interrupt you, since you are in the middle of taking care of customers, but could you give me a second?"

"What is it?"

"Actually..."

The Guild's personnel whispered the matter into Beline's ears. Beline narrowed her eyes and spoke to me.

"...Theodore-san. Ashley Schirn, the Lord, is asking for you."

When she saw me frown, Beline unintentionally gave a strained smile.

"This Lord is a little bit special. Although it seems certain that she's hated Adventurers ever since her father's generation, I only had to explain the situation in a single sentence for her to understand it easily."

"But, Oslo had an important position, right? Honestly, I'm rather reluctant."

"From my point of view, Oslo didn't really want to give any prejudices, so that is all. However, if you look at it from a glance, I think he'll give you his consent."

"Hmm..."

If we accepted that the Lord was visiting, and that she was from the opposite party, was it impossible for us to not meet her?

Although whether the matter could be dealt with peacefully was dependent on the attitude of the other party, there was a feeling that it was an advantageous position to be able to converse with the Guild as a mediator.

If we could talk directly, it would be exactly what I wanted. Even if I had tried to go and see her before now, she would have likely refused me.

"If it's fine with you, will you meet with her? I apologize to Theodore-san, but I truly hope that you can speak directly with Ashley-sama. Normally, even if you tried to meet with her, you would be turned away."

"It's fine, as long as it isn't troublesome."

"Of course. I do keep that in mind, since it was originally my job. If Theodore-san says that you want to establish a connection with Ashley-sama, that will be welcomed. The Adventurer's Guild is searching far and wide for connections with talented people.

Although I was out-spoken, even if I admitted to being manipulated, I wondered if Beline was truly honest with her words.

Agreement, huh. Well, I agreed.

Ashely was around the same age as me, afterall.

Although it was said that she's a Baroness, she was a girl with a slender figure and a fair complexion. She didn't really get courted, and the paleness of her skin was abnormal. She might have a weak body. Since she's young and has those traits from her parents, she probably has it tough.

Nevertheless, although it wasn't a good reason to justify the lack of supervision...even if I were to say it was managed like that, I had no relations to this town and held no responsibilities, whether or not there was something wrong with Ashley.

That's why, from the very beginning, no matter what type of person the Lord was, I thought that I wasn't in any position to give her my complaints. Even if she was hostile to me, she had considered the direction of being unconcerned and wouldn't interfere with us, so other than visiting her, it was unlikely to happen. Well then, I wonder what kind of business brought her here. I'll decide how to

deal with it after listening to her story.

"It's nice to meet you. My name is Ashley Lodias Schirn."

"It's nice to meet you as well. I am Theodore Gartner."

After introducing herself, Ashley bowed to me.

"This time, it seems that we caused an inconvenience to your house. Allow me to apologize for that. I truly want to thank you for fighting the Killer Ants for us."

This attitude...they knew that I had ties with the house of Count Gartner, so I couldn't tell if it was originally cowardly or not. Either way, it was hard to distinguish it.

When Beline said she wanted to speak with Ashley, she probably meant that she wanted to mend her relationship with the Lord.

Furthermore, Beline would lose trust with the garrison if she tried that, and since the party responsible for the present confusion was absent, it was a golden opportunity. It was to deal with the aftermath of the incident of the severe outbreak of ants. The ones who had the knowledge to do this was the Adventurer's Guild, and the ones to create jobs for the Adventurers were people like Beline and Ashley.

In that sense, the aftermath of the ant incident this time was probably not something I would need to take care of. I would only do so if I had to. Although it would be fine if they had a reason that made me agree to do it, it wasn't very likely this time.

The life of the whole ecosystem included the sudden appearances of Monsters and the humans that exterminated them. This supply and demand was said to be the origin of the world.

Although this was inside of BFO, there had been a quest in which Goblins that often exterminated Grey Wolves had increased in number and caused trouble. Although it had been more laughable at that time, that was no longer the case. Even if the Killer Ants had been defeated, they were still Monsters. That was why I had chosen the inexhaustible Termuilles for my provisions.

"I will accept your apology."

Just because they knew about the relations with my house didn't necessarily

mean that they would want to create a connection with nobles, and, in particular, the conditions hadn't been brought out. Although there was a severe case where it would be forgiven unconditionally without needing to say anything, that was not the case this time. I asked Beline about various things. Instead, I think I'll try to lightly support Beline, which would imply that it would lighten the overall debt the two had with each other.

"But, I just happened to be there at that time. Although, since I am an illegitimate child of the Gartner house, rather than creating a relationship with me, wouldn't it be better to mend your relationship with the guild?"

"Mend, you say?"

This...was, more or less, the expected answer.

"I have come here to interview Miss Beline many times."

"...I didn't know. Such a story hasn't reached me even once."

When I glanced at Grace, who was quietly waiting in the back, she confirmed it with just her eyes.

The point being that it was the same as when my story hadn't been delivered to dad.

Rather than it being because Ashley was a Lord, it was probably a problem with the surrounding humans.

"Was the thing that Oslo did this time also the same?"

"It's nothing to worry about, since I don't know the affairs of this city. Excuse me, but who is Oslo a subordinate of?"

"He's a retainer. From the generation of my father..."

Ashley's expression was completely bitter as she said that.

Well, that too is trust? Even if it was a reason that had Oslo cross-legged as he sat with relief, he probably had connections to it.

"What's with them in regards to the Adventurers?"

"Well..."

Ashley was set free by Beline's gaze.

"Please speak without worrying about me. As I guessed, I think that the meaning you have is correct. There is also the responsibilities of the Guild's management."

"Y-Yes. That was in regards to the downfall of the thieves and those who were reduced to poverty and the like...Dad and Grandpa...pardon me, it was a person named Kennel, as well as Oslo. Everyone unanimously agreed on that."

Certainly, there were those amongst those types of fellows, and there were also those who directed those types of eyes towards the Adventurers. Perhaps, as far as real experience goes, they pulled the short end of the stick? If that was the case with the girl's father, this person called Kennel probably also held the same values as him. So it was entrusted to Oslo... Although there might have been no problems if that guy was decent about his job, unfortunately, that didn't happen.

If I surmised the things until now, I could think of them purely as precious resources. The first thing to say was that I was honestly surprised at the existence of Kennel.

At least, Oslo was not a monolith. In the first place, if two people of the same race were fighting, there was no need for Oslo to fear any detection. Besides, it seemed that Ashley had firmly given him education. It would be enough as long as she saw how Oslo reacted earlier, and he also had good intuition. The possibility that he took practical training and education in order to assist Ashley was high.

Perhaps Kennel had focused on practical training and hadn't been caught under Oslo's surveillance?

"Is it possible to speak to this Kennel?"

It somehow seems like Beline had defined Kennel as her second goal. If Ashley was the center, then Kennel was probably the wall that surrounds her. If Oslo's failure were to be before his eyes, even if it reminded him of a stubborn, conservative, and excessive person, he would probably be unable to reconsider about various things.

"Kennel is absent right now. He is on business at the next city."

It was important, and Ashley had become confused by this.

"That's right, is it? Well then, Ashley-sama. As I, myself, am unworthy, would it be fine for you to explain the Guild's intent today?"

The so-called Presentator, Ashley, nodded with a gentle look.

"I leave it to you."

"Well, I will be careful to not simply provoke him. It is perfectly fine to mutually use each other and keep a fair distance."

"Mu. Theodore-san, quite the welcome, isn't it?"

Ashley gave an uneven smile at the exchange between Beline and me.

"But certainly, it's as Theodore-san says. As for my opinion, it's something that should be decided after thinking about it. I have never understood it to be just a rumor. As for me, I can't say that it doesn't point to devils. There won't be a meaning to it after the traitor is replaced."

"That certainly is so."

It wasn't possible to consider it if there was any difference in their values.

"Well, would you allow me to take up some of your time? I'll ask you for the data that you've collected. Theodore-san, I'll soon prepare a letter for you, as well as your reward."

Beline left while smiling. It seemed that her mood was good, so their conversation had probably proceeded well.

--

Chapter 7

--

Chapter 7 – Nostalgia

Since Beline had left, Grace poured us some black tea in her stead.

“Thank you very much. Umm...”

“I am called Grace.”

“It’s a pleasure, Grace-san.”

“Yes, Ashley-sama.”

With that, the two exchanged smiles.

After drinking the black tea and letting out a sigh, Ashley, who was seated across from me, muttered with a relieved look.

“I am slightly relieved. For you to forgive me...”

As expected, she was probably worried about my connection to the Count’s house. Even though I said I was an illegitimate child, she still honored it. Even if that wasn’t the case, Ashley wasn’t certain about being able to deal with Oslo, and this lead to her suffering enough stress to cause her stomach to hurt. Even if I tried to provide some sympathy for Ashley, since Kennel would probably be furious towards Oslo, I doubted that the treatment Oslo would receive would be anything sweet.

“You shouldn’t really worry about me.”

“Theodore-sama...even though you appear to be around the same age as me... you behave more like an adult and are rather independent.”

“Well, that depends on the circumstances.”

Although I was given the same education as my brothers by dad...it had born fruit, against my own will, according to Kagehisa’s memory and my relations to Katherine’s group. My mixed feelings prevented me from saying anything to Ashley, who was doing her best as a Lord.

“By the way, your body doesn’t seem to be in a very good condition?”

If you looked at the state that Ashley was in again, you could see that her breathing was becoming quite rough. Since sweat seemed to be slightly coming out of her forehead, her body was definitely weak.

"It's fine as long as it's this much. I've gotten used to it afterall."

"..."

So what? I also felt that my mom always said these types of things. Even just speaking with Ashley would often strain her body, causing a rebound later. Speaking about various things, rather than it being irritating, it was me being impatient.

It was something about her helpless appearance from earlier that reminded me of the time mother had been alive. It was unpleasant to remember it.

"Theodore-sama?"

Ashley's voice seemed to have doubt in it.

...Anyways, since I would be leaving the city shortly, this much was probably fine. There was also Beline's lecture after this, and Kennel's impression would certainly worsen if Ashley was genuinely taken ill by this. On the other hand, I wasn't sure when I would be able to do it if it was put off until later.

"Excuse me."

I had probably shown Ashley a glum look. I took both of her hands in mine.

"Eh? U-Um?"

"It's just as it is. Please enjoy it."

I used a skill that was derived from my Mana Circulation, Circulation Refinement (TN: 循環鍊氣). A Battlemage's Mana Circulation was said to be trained by circulating the Mana inside your body, unifying it. This would improve the quality of one's Mana, its output, and the body's abilities. Applying this on another person's body was called Circulation Refinement.

It was said to quicken the recovery of one's abnormal state, and if they were touched with the effects of it in the game, it would heal their life force. As for the reason, it mutually introduced both of their Mana and, using the disposition of the Circulation, it adjusted the flow of their feelings.

Since continuous contact was necessary, it was unsuitable during battle, but in BFO it was allowed to be used as a simple means of healing teammates.

As I held her hands, I activated my Circulation. My Mana flowed into the girl's body and circulated, as if a river's flow had been drawn into her, and, at the same time, her Mana also flowed through, adjusting the abnormalities of her veins until they were almost normal.

It was close to a symptomatic treatment, so it meant that it wouldn't remove the source of the problem, but it would replenish one's stamina and naturally heighten one's Resistance and Healing Power. It might be perfect for Ashley. As the flow was adjusted, the total amount of Mana that had been circulating from the start of the treatment began splitting inside of the girl, as if it was increased. The unified Mana would be separated if the circulation was released, and the girl's Life Energy would probably be converted ...Something like this, I wonder?

After moderately treating her, I released her hands and saw that Ashley's eyes were spinning. The girl who had been close to being pale until some time ago now had her cheeks tinged red. It seemed that the complexion of her lips were also getting better.

"How is it?"

"My body became lighter, almost as if it was a lie. Was that magic just now?"

"Strictly speaking, it isn't magic, but rather a kind of magic operation. As for Ashley-sama, you might have some talent for magic."

"Talent for magic? Me?"

"It appears that the composition of Mana inside your body is good. If you have the chance, how about learning magic that adjusts the condition of your body?"

One's body was worth investing in, afterall. The girl's health should be related to the situation of her domain. Kennel was probably overprotective of her, so she had developed a weak constitution.

//

Just as Beline, who had returned from collecting data, began her lecture, I received the money and letter from her and withdrew to my room.

Although I was told ‘How about listening together?’, I took precautions against it.

“Theodore-sama.”

Just as the door opened behind me, Grace called my name.

“Were you reminded of Lisa-sama?”

“Mm. Somewhat.”

It seemed that Grace also thought about it when she saw Ashley. Both of us understood the things we were thinking about and the things we would want to say to one another. Without saying anything else, I passed through the corridor and returned to the Guild counter.

As for later, only Forest Bird was waiting here. It was fine even if they wasted their time looking at appropriate request forms, and it might have been good to grab a light meal at the bar across the street.

It certainly wouldn’t be boring to wait at the Guild instead of at the stable. Lucian, who had said “To have Theo-kun wait at the stable is unbelievable!”, had decided to wait here. She was a rather strange child. Although it appeared that I was being respected as a noble, the way she called my name was somehow relaxed. Well, I gave her permission to call me that way, and it wasn’t bad for her to be chatty, right?

I looked at the poster on the wall and compared it to the prices in BFO. It was fairly interesting. It was completely for fun, since I wasn’t an Adventurer, but it wasn’t really crowded so I didn’t really care.

After I had wasted some time, an angry voice resounded from the Guild’s counter.

“It’s fine already, so bring me to her! It’s extremely rude to keep me in such a painful place!”

When I looked back, the Guild employees and a good-looking white-haired man were in the middle of having a dispute at the entrance.

“So, it’s in the middle of becoming a big story.”

"I won't talk to you guys! Call a woman out, like Beline!"

...I somehow understood who it was.

The situation was probably that a servant of Ashley's house had come running with all his might and on a fast horse. I could see the figure of a horse wearing a saddle outside of the door that had flown wide open.

If a solitary rider had galloped their way back, they might have arrived fairly quickly. He's quite energetic at this age. If you looked closely, surely parts of his hair and clothes would be in disorder.

...Hmm. In any case, he had taken a ship. Even though he had this setting, I couldn't put it into words.

"Excuse me, is Kennel-dono here?"

"Aah!? What is it!? The important thing just now..."

After Kennel quickly moved his gaze onto me and inspected me, he frowned, as if he had doubts.

"I'm called Theodore Gartner. The one of interest from today's matter."

"Mu..."

After listening to my name, Kennel's expression stiffened. It seemed that the exposure was a success. He probably had no choice but to be cautious. First off, I had to make him listen to me.

"Will you talk with me? It's something important about Ashley-sama."

I said that as I pointed to a table in the bar.

"...And that's what I mean."

"Is that so? That stupid Oslo...Jeez...so deplorable...man."

After explaining the day's events and Ashley's situation, Kennel sighed and shook his head.

"I'll ask you one more time. Will you place your trust in this woman called Beline?"

"If it's something work-related. In my case, I don't know. At least, she isn't a person who would resort to hasty means. That's why, without trusting her

words, as if she would listen, I told her to keep a distance. Since Ashley-sama is intelligent, I think she would have understood it.

“...Well, that is natural, of course.”

Due to the major premise that he would immediately head out if we finished talking, he listened as I talked about the present situation. Then I repeatedly explained that there was no danger to Ashley’s body. Since he had kept his composure from the beginning, I began to talk like that.

“Have you had disputes with Adventurers in the past?”

“...”

Kennel didn’t answer. His eyes became distant for a moment, and he just furrowed his eyebrows. He must use Adventurers for him to grasp it. As long as they were efficient, he understood that he needed to compromise here. He had to shift his attention here, even if he was enraged and didn’t agree.

“Even if you reorganize the guards, the demons won’t wait for us. Right now, the morale of those guards is at the lowest point, and the reason for that negligence is big. Those who are injured and aren’t skillful will die. Whatever the case may be, I think that the hands of the Adventurers are necessary.”

If that happened, various problems would arise, like money that would be paid to nobles and the people’s complaints.

“After talking with Theodore-dono, I feel as if I’m somehow talking with an adult.”

Kennel laughed sarcastically as he narrowed his eyes.

“Pardon me for that. I was also told by my dad that I am good at talking.”

“Fumu...I’m envious of the Count’s house. You are quite the prodigy.”

Kennel sank into his chair as if he were tired and dropped his shoulders. The fine sight of authority from earlier cooled down and revealed the appearance of an old gentleman that was fit for his age.

“As for me, I have no rights to his succession. My relationship with my stepmother is also bad. Though, with Ashley-sama, my future appears to be promising.”

“I...had only thought that it would be good if she had been fairly happy as the child of a noble. If only Elliot-sama had returned uninjured at that time...I had thought that several times.”

“Who is Elliot-sama?”

“He was the original heir. Five years ago, when the previous head and his wife disappeared as they were returning from their study abroad...it turned out that they had been caught up in an accident on the ship they were taking.”

Five years ago...huh. Really, Ashley makes me think about various things.

--

Chapter 8

— —

Chapter 8 – Friendship

“Old geezer!”

While I was talking with Kennel, Ashley and Beline came out of the Guild together.

“Ashley-sama...! For them to have made you run around like this...!”

Kennel unintentionally rose to his feet, but he restrained himself when he noticed Ashley’s behavior as she trotted over. It seemed like he did not notice Beline beside her.

These two had generally interacted carefully around each other, just like this, until now. If it was like this everyday, surely he would be labeled as being overprotective.

“No, old geezer. Right now, my body’s condition feels really great. In fact, Theodore-sama—”

And with that, Ashley relayed to him about the Circulation Refinement that was performed.

“What did you say...Is this true?”

“Yeah, well, it’s just temporary you know?”

“But still. I have never seen Ashley-sama in such good health. I would like to express my thanks.”

Since he, himself, was satisfied with that, he probably had good intentions. Still, I’ll handle it with a vague reply.

“Ah, Theo-kun.”

Lucian had also returned...Somehow a group of people has gathered. Since Forest Bird had good manners, their reputation would probably never be tarnished, even if they appeared in front of Kennel.

“Is it about time to depart?”

“No, it’s not done yet. You see, the truth is that everyone’s gear consolidation

isn't finished."

"Because of the Killer Ants, huh?"

"That's right. Somehow, the carriage's attachments rattle and it's useless to attempt to sharpen our swords, since there are no whetstones. It might be impossible for us to leave by tomorrow."

It looked like they had abused their weapons too much when they had fought the ants. Since the ants' exoskeletons were solid, their weapons had been damaged. Formic Acid, was it? Though, I'm glad that the acid didn't become a problem. The acid wasn't too strong, since its species wasn't that high up on the food chain.

Anyways, it was more than the equipment entrusting its life to you. One had to adapt and get used to using them. It wasn't good to just replace them.

"Well, it looks like we'll have to go rent a room."

"If it's like that, why not come and stay at my house?"

Ashley asked.

Somehow, there didn't seem to be a proper way to answer..

"Is it no good?"

"Rather than that, there isn't a reason to receive your help like that."

"Reason?"

Ashley inclined her small head in curiosity. I wondered if she understood the importance of what I said. It was something like Beline's give-and-take. In Ashley's case, it was hard for her to do so, since there was no bargain.

No...It wasn't like that. I should just be reasonable and acknowledge it. I had various experiences that were similar to Ashley's circumstances. If my dad had passed away five years ago, instead of my mom, the situation wouldn't have felt the same.

That was why I wanted to help her, while leaving out things like personal interest and give-and-take.

That was all. It was likely that I would go too far with this and that. If the me of five years ago had the strength of my current self, I would have regretted what

had happened to mom to the extent of wishing for the impossible.

In return for this, should I be especially kind to Ashley?...It's unproductive. As for me, I had no kindness towards those who lived while going around helping others without discrimination, like my mom had done. I, too, have limits. That's why, even if something was done, I thought that she would want to move on after securing motives that we could agree upon.

Generally, as for Ashley...surely there was no reason to impart her feelings to me.

Although it appeared that she strangely trusted me, due to me restoring her condition, even if you considered that, letting us stay in her house was merely out of kindness.

"I wonder if it's also fine to have you do me a favor?"

"I have to at least tell you that I will depart early tomorrow, you know?"

"I understand that."

Kennel nodded in regret.

"Theodore-sama."

When Ashley called my name, I turned to her. She seemed slightly embarrassed as she spoke.

"I'm just...Well. I want to become friends with Theodore-sama."

"Eh?"

As that was said, things came to a slight standstill.

Friends, you say?

If I thought about it...She wasn't a companion I would have had a relation with, until she had called out to me like that.

It was far from acting as a Count. If people like Byron and Daryl had influence with their authority, no one would go near them.

Although Grace trusted me, rather than being my friend, she was more of a sister. Servants normally adhere to their position after all.

Ashley was waiting for my response. I took in a deep breath before I answered.

"I understand, Ashley-sama. Let's become friends."

So...Well, it was fine, right? As for the other people, it was fine to say that they were slightly different. How to describe it...I'm rather alone.

"I'm glad..."

"Though I'm going to Termuilles, I'll send you letters."

"Yes, I will write them as well."

"It's normal for staying at a friend's house overnight to be a bit of a burden."

"Yeah."

Well, if it was a friend, wasn't it normal...to teach her Beginner Healing Magic chants? I knew that Ashley had talent. I didn't think that I could teach her everything before leaving, so I decided to write an introductory memo on the process of magic and leave it with her for now.

When our conversation settled down, Kennel and Beline were talking with each other.

"Kennel-sama, to tell the truth, I have thought of something good."

As Beline finished speaking to Kennel, she gave him a business smile. Kennel sighed from the bottom of his heart.

"What is it, fox girl?"

Beline completely ignored his remark.

"This time, as part of Ashley's health rehabilitation, Oslo should no longer be under Kennel-sama's surveillance. In addition to your work as a butler, you do things like the territory management and business all by yourself, right?"

"Mu..."

"Therefore, I have a proposal. Please lend me your ear for a bit."

"Fumu..."

When she whispered something into Kennel's ear, his face became red and he got angry.

"No, no. Please listen to what I want to ask you until the end—"

However, Beline muttered something else, without looking worried at all.

Kennel's face calmed down.

...Well. What kind of killer phrase did she say to him, I wonder? Beline was smiling from beginning to end. Although I had already known it...her soul was quite dark.

"How about it? I can also introduce her to a doctor that you can rely on. Besides, Kennel-sama surely knows what's best given the current situation, since you aren't getting around to it. For nobles, what's important is a person's connections. Rather than the current situation, he would be very beneficial for Ashley's future. As for that—"

As Beline showered him with her flowing eloquence, Kennel interrupted her with his hand.

"I get it! I get it! I'll ask Ashley-sama about it later! Is that fine with you!? I'll think about the things that will come in the future!"

"Of course. It's more than me coming here as a supporter. As incompetent as I am, I will use all of my power to cooperate with you."

Beline smiled. It seemed that the winner had been decided.

"All of you are good-for-nothings."

"Well then, we will go ahead and look for an inn."

"No, you guys come with me. Fox girl, you come too."

Kennel stopped Lucian from trying to stand up and leave. Lucian turned towards Beline, who shrugged.

"He will judge both of you based on what he sees, since it's better that way. I also advised Kennel-sama to do this, as well as to all of you. The point is that Forest Bird's mannerisms are good enough to be trustworthy."

Though, that wasn't the case when it was said that Forest Bird was a good example.

There were also adventurers who disgraced the Guild, but since there weren't many of them, those who worked with Kennel might just improve his impression of them.

"By the way, what did you say to Kennel-san?"

“Well, it’s better to remain silent, since it was annoying. If it’s Theodore-san, I’m sure that you will understand, right?”

“What is it?”

“I’m not really plotting anything bad, ok? I won’t be doing anything that will be bad for your plans. It’s a principle of mine after all.”

...What the hell did that mean?

Setting aside Beline’s true intentions, I made my first 「Friend」since coming to this world, amongst various other things.

--

Chapter 8.5

--

Chapter 8.5 – Beline’s Afternoon

And now.

A young magician with golden eyes and hair left Schirn with his servant and fellow Adventurers.

Beline had her work cut out for her.

First, she had to keep in touch with the neighboring Guild branches and recruit those who had the potential ability to deal with the Demons that were expected to appear, as well as those who specialized in surveying the forest. People would naturally gather if she promised great rewards.

If that happened, she would need to confirm the Adventurers’ abilities and their personalities in a timely fashion. If a big problem were to occur, Kennel’s trust towards her would be ruined once again.

Although she had the patience to create a semblance of a relationship with Kennel, he might run out of patience quickly if she relied on him. After thinking about this, she realized that it was still impossible to predict all the work she still had to do in Schirn. However, she knew she had to gain a monopoly over skilled Adventurers.

In regards to Schirn’s lord, her outlook was comparatively brighter. This didn’t mean that she was going to be directly involved with the work from the Guild, as she originally did not have a direct relationship with them. However, Beline would wholeheartedly welcome people who were honest and wouldn’t be dissatisfied with their personal work and the Guild. When she felt that someone was worthy of working for, she exerted herself for them. It was that type of scenario.

Although Beline was under pressure from her job and was unable to play around, she was currently in the reception room at Ashley’s mansion, late in the afternoon, face-to-face with Kennel, who was drinking tea.

Of course, this didn’t mean that she had come to play. She wanted to confirm the status of the proposal that she had offered him earlier.

“And so—Have you confirmed Ashley-sama’s intentions?”

"Umu. She had two replies. One was that she is the same age as her friend, and that, until now, she hasn't had any. She was quite happy."

Kennel looked sad as he narrowed his eyes.

"I think it's time to retire these old bones."

"What are you saying so half-heartedly? You have a lot of work piled up, don't you? You're playing a very important role so that Ashley-sama can spend her time in peace. There is no mistake; your work supports Ashley-sama from the shadows. A large amount of money will be spent on the town, since the cost of paying Adventurers for their services is increasing. There is also the restructuring and retraining of the guard unit. Also—"

"Ah, I get it. You don't need to say anything else. It was just an idle complaint."

Kennel coldly waved his hand, as he interrupted her, but Beline realized that his condition has returned to normal and smiled deeply.

"You don't need to worry about me. Rather, instead of talking about Ashley-sama, shouldn't we take Theodore-dono into consideration? How do you view him?"

When Kennel asked for her opinion, Beline tilted her head and placed her hand on her chin.

"Hmm, let's see. His personality is a bit warped."

"That...is that fine?"

"It's probably fine. Speaking of that child, many find it hard to pretend to be an Adventurer and make a living off of it, and I have seen various children go off on business trips. He is warped in a relatively decent way. He has the capability to stand out, but since he is quite apprehensive, I see him as a danger here...at least, I don't think that he is a bad person or inhuman. Well...it's a good risk. Why don't you give him another try?"

Beline saw him as a young boy.

Although she realized that this wasn't the case...it was partly because Beline didn't understand him well enough. He was a child gifted with high skill, higher than that of adults who excelled in his field of work. He was an eloquent child

with a sharp mind. Although these were also talents, this was the reason she could not understand him.

As for Theodore's background, from her point of view, it was a mixture of something she could guess and something completely mysterious.

As for what she understood...that young boy drew a line to keep everyone distant from him, so that they wouldn't get intimate with him. Considering the fact that he was strangely favorable towards Adventurers, regardless of whether or not he yearned to be one like other young boys, was there a good memory involving Adventurers in his past?

Perhaps a part of her could get along with him because he cared about contracts.

There was trust because it was a contract. Even if she were betrayed, she could judge him accordingly, without getting hurt or getting into trouble. He was also like that.

Anyways, the caution he held towards others was high. Her impression of him was that he seemed like a wild wolf that had received many wounds from humans in the past. However, his eyes when he looked at that girl called Grace were gentle, so perhaps he was very open-minded towards people who were related to him and personally engaged with him occasionally. On the other hand, the attitude he had towards enemies of people related to him was severe. The eyes that Theodore had shown when he faced Oslo had made Beline's blood run cold, even though she was accustomed to those situations.

Trying to imagine a scene where one had to calm down from that state, made Beline furrow her brows.

That was why he was dangerous. A part of her thought that he could do anything he wanted to with that great ability of his, so it was possible that he would behave recklessly until he hit his limits. It was easy to see, since there was no other reason for such a young boy to go to Termuilles.

As for Beline...she didn't want that young boy to become unhappy. It was fine for him to lower his guard against others a bit more, and it was fine for him to behave like a child.

She thought that he shouldn't live in such a way.

Although it was good for that servant girl to be with him...she was similar to a

relative who the young boy had trusted since the beginning, so no matter what their relationship was, there was no reason for him to lessen his caution towards strangers.

In order to make him relax and take some of the burden off of him, there needed to be someone who could pass through the barrier that he had created... Ashley was the most suitable candidate for this. She was different from Beline and didn't use any tactics, and Theodore also appeared to be empathetic towards her.

Ashley's personality was also likeable, and taking the scarcity of her personal connections and her health into consideration...Theodore was likely the right person at the right time and place.

"You really... are a fox girl..."

"Hmm...what was that?"

Beline smiled as Kennel's shoulders trembled in amazement. Kennel couldn't help being astonished that he had fallen for Beline's tricks.

In other words, even Beline would profit from this.

This was originally related to her job, since the relationship between the Guild and the Lord of Schirn would improve. The Guild's assessment of her was still high.

Although she had been startled by Theodore, who knew things about environmental improvement and could convince people of his opinions...He was in Termuilles and Beline was at Schirn. Theodore might be dissatisfied, but Beline didn't care about that.

She was confident that he would never hit Ashley, who didn't know anything, just because of his displeasure with Beline.

In the first place, Beline had told him that she would welcome it if he got involved with Ashley.

It had been nothing more than a declaration that he would be used if he got involved, and he had surely understood this. Beline had no reason to hesitate in her actions.

Of course, Ashley also had something to gain, while Kennel's work would make progress. In other words, this method allowed her to kill more than two birds

with one stone.

The plan was to use the people surrounding Theodore, and Beline believed that it was fine as long as nobody became unhappy. Beline would rather enjoy the reaction the young boy would show her the next time they met.

This was an interlewd.

Maybe the next story will take place at Termuilles.

--

Chapter 9

--

Chapter 9 – Boundary City

It was about time for it to come into view, huh.

We had been travelling along a narrow valley between the mountains for a while. Rocking back and forth in the carriage, we passed through a dull rocky area, when suddenly, one side of the mountain abruptly cut off and opened up our view. What came into sight and caught our eyes was Termuilles and the vast, expanding sea behind it.

“O-Ooh! Amazing!”

“Uwaah...”

Shouts of joy could be heard from the Forest Bird members outside of the carriage. The corners of my mouth curved upward as I instinctively understood their reaction.

“Theo-kun! Grace-san! It’s amazing!”

Lucian informed us excitedly from the driver’s seat. Grace, who sat beside me, looked out from the carriage window at the superb sight.

“This certainly...is amazing...”

Grace’s voice escaped in admiration of the view. I can understand her high spirits from looking at this view. To be honest, I think the best view of Termuilles is from a high place like this.

Like in Japan, if one chose to take a day to visit this world, a published sightseeing magazine would have photos of Termuilles on its front cover.

Termuilles was a city adorned with outer walls in a near perfect circle. The first thing that people would notice was probably the Ceorem Palace that oversees

the heart of the city. One could see the silhouette of the setting sun and the sea from there.

The Ceorem was a giant high-rise building, unlikely to be found anywhere else. The majestic appearance of its tall towers, that seemed to soar into the heavens, was overwhelming to all who saw it. The Ceorem was made with white stone and was impressive enough to leave one speechless.

A shrine was nestled within the Ceorem and acted as an entrance to the labyrinth.

Although it was originally a relatively quiet building with a different structure than the absurd Ceorem...it had been modified to complement the Palace later on.

Surrounding the Palace and its shrine were streets that spread out between houses and shops.

Within the heart of the city, the buildings closer to the center were old, stone buildings, while the ones built further away were ordinary.

It was rumoured that the castle and the streets within the heart of the city were originally part of the labyrinth...but there was no credible basis for this. They seemed to be using the ruins as they were, but even if it were true, if you ignored the extraordinary things like the scale of the interior and adornments, the structures themselves seemed reasonable. Speaking of reasonable things, since it wasn't actually part of the labyrinth, there was nothing more to it.

"Although I've heard about it from stories, it's pretty amazing."

It looked like Forest Bird had also longed to come to the Boundary City, but, for now, they seemed to be considering how to improve their abilities here. That being said, in reality, this was the first time any of them had visited the Boundary City.

"The expansive labyrinth is underneath that city, right?"

"That seems likely for this place, as well."

After supplementing Monica's words with an explanation, all of them turned their eyes towards me.

"Eh?"

"No, well, it's fine to think of the expansive labyrinth and the small mountain we're walking on as one and the same. You can see it from here, and from the mountains over there as well."

"What's that...?"

"Well, although there was originally a mine that ran through the interior of the mountain, its internal structure has changed as it eroded into a part of the labyrinth."

There was a reason it was called a large, living labyrinth. It wasn't just that its structure changed, its environment was like an underground forest, thickly covered in vegetation. Though, one of the areas within the forest, The Twilight Forest, had a completely different ecosystem than normal forests. Even though there were also areas connected to the sea...the lower levels weren't submerged in water at all, so it was completely abnormal.

There were also many transfer spots that allowed one to move from area to area. I had no clue what happened to the labyrinth's structure as a whole, though. Thanks to this, it seemed that students and researchers were at their wits' end, studying the labyrinth day after day. There were even quests for on-site investigations where researchers had slight nervous breakdowns.

When they sorted out the rough sketches in order to create a full map, they thought about things like the area's length, relative positions, the structural interior, and the increase and decrease of new areas that, more than likely, weren't there in the beginning...This confusion was what normally came out of these investigations. It was completely a ghost story.

These were also reasons why it was called something like 'Boundary City' and 'Passage to the spirit world.' Although places like the 「Old Mine Path」that ran directly under this mountain were ordinary labyrinths with comparatively low danger rates, if someone dove deep down, the abnormalities and dangerous Demons would gradually increase. The exploration of the deeper levels should progress slowly.

"I'm sorry...I might've made light of Termuilles."

"I'll only warn you that you'll be unable to return to your original spot if you go to a different area or level in the large labyrinth, though I think you already knew

about that.”

“Wasn’t it...a door with a one-way passage?”

“Speaking of that.. From the stairs on the 10th floor onwards, its structure will be like that, completely. You will come to understand about the one-way doors that connect to another area.”

Although I spoke like it was from hearsay, this came from personal experience. There were passages related to this amongst the books I read in dad’s study but, well, it was all within the range of common sense.

“Well, how will we return once we go inside the labyrinth?”

Grace asked. This was the most frequently-asked question, though it seemed like all of Forest Bird knew about it.

“Stones called Dimension Stones are scattered within...if you use it when a stele, which are also scattered around, is in front of you, you will be able to return to the entrance. Red Dimension Stones will let you return immediately from wherever you are, but you won’t be able to bring it back with you if you use it up inside of the labyrinth.”

“The reds are for emergency evacuation, is it?”

“That’s correct. By the way, you won’t be able to bring back the usual Dimension Stones. The Red Dimension Stones are a separate matter, and you can take them outside of the labyrinth. They are valuable and are worth quite a bit. After all, there are a lot of guys who misjudge the situation and end up dying because they wanted to take the Reds back with them, instead of using them. Speaking of when you could use the Reds, it’s fine to assume that various situations will happen, so discuss what to do if they happen and decide from there.”

When one entered the labyrinth, they were able to transfer from the stele of the labyrinth’s entrance to a level they had previously gone to at least once. If one took a normal Dimensional Stone outside of the labyrinth, it would break apart. It was also said that there was a high risk in transferring to a deeper level. That’s why Dimension Stones could only function within the large labyrinth, and it was important to procure them locally.

Even if one found a stele, they could only wait for their death by demons, since it was impossible to escape without a Dimension Stone. You could also get lost while searching for Dimension Stones. It was different from BFO, where you would be returned to the entrance on death.

"Yeah. Well, why don't we discuss this later. I'm sorry for boring you to death with such a topic."

Robin nodded his head on everyone's behalf when I said that. I wonder if Forest Bird is fine with this much.

"About the Dimension Stones, you're able to transfer goods out of the labyrinth, right?"

Lucian asked while tilting her head, so I nodded to her.

"Yeah. You draw a circle with something that looks like blackboard chalk...that allows you to make a simple Transfer Gate to transfer goods out of the labyrinth. I think that there are probably short courses on that if you go to the guild to get permission to go down into the labyrinth."

"I'm just bad at remembering fine details like that."

"I don't think it's that difficult though. As long as you learn it from a book, that is."

One could send goods out of the labyrinth as long as a transfer magic formation was drawn outside of the labyrinth ahead of time. If the layout of this magic formation was correct, it wouldn't matter if it was ordinary ink that was used. However, the person who drew it had to be the one to transfer the goods, or else it wouldn't function. It was desirable to have the whole party draw one.

At Boundary City, there were businesses that lent out something similar to warehouses. These loan warehouses were established at inns and were said to be for Adventurers. They were included in the inn fees...and it was strictly forbidden to draw transfer magic formations inside of one's inn room. Although you couldn't transfer living things out of the labyrinth with the usual Dimension Stones, the possibility of dangers like fires and other such things had to be considered.

“Theo-kun is well informed.”

“I’ve studied books after all.”

“...Are there other things we should be careful about?”

“Before you descend down into the labyrinth via a transfer from the entrance, you should check the phase of the moon. It’s fine to go when it’s a new moon... but it is better to avoid going at all costs when it’s a full moon. Though, I think that the personnel at the entrance will warn you about that.”

“How come...?”

“On the day of a new moon, only the suggested routes will change as the walls of the labyrinth close, open, and move around, but during a full moon, the transfer zones become dangerous.”

“But why?”

Rather than seeming to happen, it definitely would happen.
It was called the Reverse Labyrinth amongst the BFO players... Well, the income it gave was quite delicious.

“Though it’s quite scary if the walls open and close.”

“It’s dangerous because it will change when no one is looking at it. If you know the timing from the start, you won’t get lost from your assumptions and its structure won’t change to where it’s impossible to escape. New treasure appears immediately after a new moon and a full moon, so that should be your target.”

Since I hadn’t heard stories of parties being split apart or disrupted by the structure change, this place might be user friendly... Maps were fundamentally worthless on the night of a new moon, and even if they could be put to practical use, they had to be rewritten periodically.

It was natural for elements of the same affinities to gather in similar areas, though it was possible to take measures against their tendencies to head to certain areas.

“Even though I’ve said various things, it only applies up to the 20th Level. When the time comes for you to think about how to proceed from there, it will

be good to leave some leeway by having some Dimension Stones.”

“As for what Theo-kun says, you can’t be relieved, since it’s not that good there.”

“Yeah.”

Pardon me.

“For what purpose would someone want to make such a place?”

Grace asked, concerned with the foundation of the labyrinth.

“It’s like a testing ground or place that protects ancient treasure...various things were said about it. I don’t understand the story behind this place very well. There is no record of what is in its depths, since there hasn’t been any humans who have seen it.”

The labyrinth was used simply because it was here, and a city had been created around it, since it was quite sturdy for humans.

As we proceeded forward while talking about this and that on the topic of the labyrinth’s interior, we gradually got close to Termuilles.

After passing through a hilly area and descending from a slightly elevated mountain, a grassland spread out before us. We continued on the smooth road to Termuilles.

Even though the day would soon be over...we were able to reach the gate and enter the queue to enter the city. It was evening, but regardless of it being day or night, you were able to enter this large city...It seemed that it would take us a while to wait for our turn in this line.

--

Chapter 10

--

Chapter 10 – A Mother’s Tracks

It took us a full day to reach the end of the line and enter Termuilles City. Although it was already evening, there was still a relatively large amount of people, compared to the traffic of the towns of Baron Schirn and Count Gartner. The races that stood out in the human town were Elves, Dwarves, and the Beastfolk. They didn’t appear in public and preferred secluded areas. There was a superstition that caused them to be harshly persecuted, because there were lower education standards. They were treated with prejudice, discrimination, and other similar attitudes.

As for myself...this scene made my tension rise. The city felt quite imposing since the NPCs and Players weren’t avatars, but real people.

Perhaps the atmosphere was unique to the Boundary City, but one shouldn’t be immersed in their feelings.

There were a lot of things we needed to do after arriving at the city, so it was impossible to immediately head towards the Labyrinth.

In the first place, since Forest Bird completed their mission once we arrived in Termuilles, I needed to give them their completion bonus.

“Thank you very much. Huh? This is...No, isn’t this too much?”

“I might still have things I’ll need your help with, so at that time, I’ll be relying on you.”

“Is that true~? I’m glad.”

Lucian smiled.

The Forest Bird in particular had been able to travel stress-free.

Although Dad had been the one to suggest an escort, I had been the one to choose my traveling companions. The journey would not have been as smooth if Grace and I had travelled alone.

If it had been just us, we may have been pressured by something like needing to procure supplies, and could have lost our carriage when we encountered the ants. Not only that, I think we would have been viewed as easy targets by malicious people, and would have definitely attracted unnecessary trouble. I'm really thankful that Forest Bird was with us.

Ideally, trustworthy companions wouldn't be swayed by money. These guys wanted to build a firm relationship with me.

"Although a part of me has yet to decide on what to do from here, for now, I'll go and talk with the Adventurer's Guild."

"Then we will go relay Theo-kun's name to the inn that we'll be staying at for the night."

"It's okay for you guys to wait for me at the Guild. We're going to do a bit of work around here...and if we can do it by ourselves, we might go settle down afterwards."

"I pray that your work goes well. It's fundamental for Forest Bird to stay together, so it will be fine as long as you don't recklessly go too far into the Labyrinth."

After I answered them while nodding to Lucian and Monica, they smiled at me.

"What will you do after this?"

"We will head to the place where my dad's intermediary is supposed to be."

My father's acquaintance, Rossetta Athenblow, was said to live on Fallen Leaf Street, in the Eastern District.

Although he had told me that she was an elderly person, I wondered what she would be like. Dad's conditions for me to come to Termuilles were to have an escort along the way and to meet with Rossetta Athenblow once I arrived. I had to fulfill my promise to him.

"Well then, we will escort you there."

"You have various things to do as well...like searching for an inn, right?"

"Well, it's not a problem if it's this much. This is quite thrilling for me."

Mmm. Well, that's fine?

//

If I had to describe the Eastern District, it was an area where lots of rich people lived. As for the reason why, maybe it was related to the amount of sunlight the area received. When it came to my dad's acquaintance, it was thanks to him that she was living in the Eastern District.

Nevertheless, I didn't think she was a person who was involved with nobles. When we arrived at the residence that was written about on dad's note, we found a modest but elegant mansion.

"Well then, we will part ways here."

"Aah. Thanks."

"See you later, Theo-kun, Grace-san."

"Yeah. Let's meet up again later."

We separated from Forest Bird and headed to the door of Rossetta's residence. Some time after sounding the lionhead door knocker, a woman with dark red hair appeared. She was probably between her late 20's or early 30's. She didn't have the atmosphere of a servant. Was this woman Rossetta? As the redhead's gaze dropped down to us, she moved closer to Grace and me.

"I'm very sorry for coming so late in the evening. Is this the residence of Rossetta Athenblow-sama?"

"Just Rossetta is fine. Um...You're Theodore, right? Henri's child. Then, this person over here is Grace?"

"That's right. Have you met us before?"

I didn't have any recollection of that happening. Since she said that she knew that I was Henri's child, did that mean she knew my mother as well?

"I met you once, when you were a baby. The next time we met was at Henri's residence. I've met you a total of two times. Well, it's natural that you don't remember. As for Grace...even though I had heard about her from Risa in a letter, I recognized her immediately. You really are a pretty child."

"From Risa-sama?"

Grace's eyes bulged out in slight surprise, and Rossetta gave her a smile. In

other words, she was a person that Mom had trusted enough to talk to about Grace.

Speaking of which, the second time she met me, was that when Mom passed away? She knew of Mom's death...and I think people came to our residence to mourn her...I don't remember it too well.

"Here, this is Dad's letter."

Rossetta nodded and lightly cast her eyes down to the sealed letter I held out to her.

"This is definitely from the Count's residence. Please, come in."

//

"...What's in the letter?"

"Your father wrote that he wants me to accommodate you on various things, in order to help you live here."

After passing through the reception room, we settled down and began to talk. Rossetta looked over the letter many times, and then faced me as I sat on the other side of the table.

"I understand your circumstances. Wanting to learn magic in Termuilles...is it so that you can enroll in the Perezford School? I'll meet your expectations as long as it's something I'm capable of doing."

The Perezford School was an educational facility located in the Eastern District. It was similar to a college, and those who enrolled there were able to take lectures and receive training in order to cultivate knowledge and skills as they desired. Aside from being an educational facility, it also served as a research facility.

In regards to the students who commuted, since they had a variety of ages, races, and goals, the school was liberal, rather than laissez-faire.

However, it was a different story for the children of nobles. Common students had a dorm in a separate school building. Children of nobles upheld that the reason for this was to help the education of those who were worthy.

However, those nobles didn't have any real relation to me. Since I didn't come

here to become a so-called ‘Gallant Noble,’ I had no plans to enter a dorm. I just planned on learning appropriate magic for daily life, and even if I was to say that I wanted to study other things, nothing came to mind. Perhaps that would just end up as a waste of my time.

Even though I had plans to, at minimum, enroll in order to learn magic that would be useful for daily life, I had planned on spending my free time as I liked while avoiding a stereotypical image. One couldn’t freely dive down into the Labyrinth, because that would be putting the cart before the horse.

“Although there was that as well, I want to search for a house in the city.”

“A house?”

“Even if I trouble Rossetta-san, it won’t change the fact that I’m affiliated with him, since you were introduced through Dad. As long as I am capable of it, I will do things by myself.”

After I finished saying that, Rossetta looked at my face keenly, with doubt. Although the two of us stared at each other for a while, she eventually shifted her gaze elsewhere and sighed very deeply.

“...Fine. Let’s do as you wish.”

“I thought you would oppose me.”

“It’s surprising, isn’t it? The face you’re making says that you believed that I would oppose you.”

Rossetta gave a sardonic smile.

“Of course, my heart is against it, but you are...If I did that, you would leave without hesitation, right? You don’t look anxious at all, and even if you don’t gain my favor, you have the ability to suddenly appear at my house. He also mentioned that you are...capable of using chantless magic, so, if our conversation ended in a disagreement, I would have needed to think of something at that time?”

“Well, that’s true.”

Would she arrange a base for me to live in while I took up a room in an inn,

went to the Adventurer's guild, and dove down into the Labyrinth? Perhaps she would arrange it because I would be diving down there? Either way, it was just a difference in perspectives.

"So, that's why I've concluded that it's better to cooperate with you, since you're quite certain, rather than letting it become a situation where I must watch over you. That's the reason, more or less. Will you agree?"

"...Yes."

...I see. Certainly, if she had ordered me around without listening to me, I would have left.

Coming here to talk about my story didn't have any significance for me, other than fulfilling the promise with my dad.

However, that wasn't the case for Rossetta. She said that I had eyes that were looking far into the future.

"If something were to happen to you...I wouldn't be able to explain myself to Risa."

"...You're Mom's acquaintance, aren't you?"

"It's more like I'm your parents' acquaintance. We were classmates in the same school.

We went down into the Labyrinth together."

Ah, that meant that she had met my mom and dad at Termuilles. Though, I knew quite a bit about Dad, since I had listened to Mom's stories when I was young.

On the other hand, I didn't think it was that strange. The Boundary City gathered people from various places and allowed them to study so that they could accumulate knowledge and skills.

The schools of Termuilles were said to be places where nobles, people with talent, and other similar people came together.

"Well, please stay at the house for today and recover from your long trip."

"Understood."

Besides, didn't she dive down into the Labyrinth with Mom? Exactly what kind

of person was Rossetta? Even if I looked at her, she just smiled at me.

--

Chapter 11

--

Chapter 11 – House-Hunting

G5: Slight change on the term for Grace's Ring. It was labeled as a Magical Tool but from now on it will be called as Cursed Artifact. Also, who doesn't like spending money? :D enjoy~

"Let's see. There are some decent properties with a monthly rent of 75 Kilig. What are you looking for?"

This was said by Kyson Mortis, a real-estate agent who had been introduced by Rossetta.

Kyson was a bearded man with a good physique. He looked exactly like the merchants depicted in pictures...and he probably didn't have that bad of a personality, since he had been introduced by Rossetta. I couldn't be negligent though.

"75 Kilig, is it? I can't really answer that without seeing the properties."

"Of course. Shall we head over to the nearby places?"

With that, we decided to go look at the houses together and walked along a beautiful paved road in the Eastern District.

We had obtained horses and a carriage, which were owned by the Count, and ridden them here. Setting aside the matter of the carriage, the surplus of horses that Forest Bird rode on were later taken to the Guild, which had them delivered to the Count as a favor. Dad had also arranged it.

Other than that, the rent was 75 Kilig per month, huh? We should briefly discuss the values Kyson had mentioned. Kilig refers to the Kilig Copper Coins. Since this currency is used on a daily basis, it was common to ask questions like "How many Kilig is it?", or "How many Coppers is it?"

If you used gold coins as a basis, then one Sebel Gold Coin was equivalent to 20

Arben Silver Coins, 100 Rodel Large Copper Coins, 500 Kilig Copper Coins, or 5000 Moor, which had the lowest value.

Although this currency couldn't realistically be compared to the Japanese Yen, since it was completely different, a sensible exchange rate would probably be one Kilig for 1000 Yen.

The monthly salary of a standard laborer was around 100 Kilig. With a rent of 75 Kilig per month, the majority of a month's income would vanish into thin air. There were a large amount of people thought similarly. As expected of the expensive residential area of the Eastern District.

Perhaps Kyson was trying to estimate our personal budget, which was large enough to have him make a personal appearance.

Coincidentally...the amount of money I had been given when I left the house was 5000 Kilig.

It was composed of 9 Gold and 20 Silver Coins. Perhaps this amount of money was given in consideration of the fact that I might not be able to provide for myself, or because he had wanted to make me less dependent on him. To be honest, I thought that he was being overprotective.

The reward money from the ant extermination that had happened along the way had been split equally, and I was given 560 Kilig. Although it was debatable as to whether a reward of 560 Kilig was too high or too low for defeating a swarm of ants...it wasn't worth complaining about, since I felt that it had been an easy profit.

Additionally, I had paid Forest Bird an extra 120 Kilig as their completion reward when we arrived at Termuilles, which brought their total reward up to 720 Kilig...Even if I deducted the costs of the various things we bought on the journey...the amount of money I currently had leftover was 4514 Kilig.

"By the way, what's your reason for buying this house?"

In that case, it wouldn't be renting, but paying off the loan for your own house...There were probably a lot of people who didn't know the normal market prices of houses, so all of them often asked for the cost.

"Although it isn't a new house, it's still good. The price for this one is 29,300 Kilig. In this case, there will be an interest of 100 Kilig per month, in addition to

the total amount. There is a possibility that you will be evicted if you are unable to maintain the house; however, if you decide to buy the house after renting it for a time, it's possible to lower the total payment based on how much you've paid for its rent."

...So if I paid 1200 Kilig per year, it would take 24 years to finish payments. This kind of thing included the interest. You would understand if you looked at the fine print on the contract.

"Since you were introduced by Rossetta-sama, I'm more or less being allowed to study the market."

"I would be sure to accommodate you if Henri were to contact me. You can also consult with me in regards to financing."

Rossetta had said something similar. So, she wanted to visit every now and then, huh? I understood that she wanted me to be somewhere she could observe.

I'll politely refuse Rossetta's offer.

I should probably decide on buying a house after taking some time to look at them.

As of now, I wasn't sure how much money I could earn and spend if I made a living by diving into the Labyrinth...

Although I had confidence in just earning money, it would cause fatigue, sickness, injuries, and other complications to my health if I pushed myself too hard. I wanted to save up money as well, so I would rather pass on leading a stressful life caused by a harsh working environment.

"Well? If you want to ask something, I can respond at any time, you know?"

Rossetta looked like she was thinking about something while showing a gentle smile. I wonder how long I could pay the house rent without needing to rely on dad?

"It's a good deal no matter how you look at it. Well, you only have one servant, Grace, so if the maintenance is too much for you to deal with, you will have to look for another house.

"Though if that were to happen, I think that the maintenance would only be

too much to deal with in the beginning? Ah, we have arrived. It's that house."

The house that Kyson showed us was a two-story building with white walls and a red roof...it was a relatively good house. A stone wall with an iron fence went around the house and there was a small garden within the grounds... When he said that it would only be too much to deal with in the beginning, was this why? The flowers were running wild in the garden.

"What is this?"

Grace knitted her eyebrows when she saw this.

"Well, we haven't gotten around to hiring someone to maintain the outside. It's quite pretty on the inside though, and we can also arrange for a gardener."

"A gardener isn't really needed. I think that the majority of the work will just be pulling out weeds and planting flowers. Should we talk about renting this place?"

Grace casted a glance my way.

If she was temporarily released from her cursed artifact, she could probably complete the weeding in one go.

This house had been built on School Street. It was in a quiet area, a short distance away from the heart of the school.

You could go to the Eastern District's Main Street, the Marketplace, and, from there, to the entrance to the Labyrinth in a decent amount of time.

As the street's name suggested, the school was right under its nose. Looking at the house's location and its architecture...75 Kilig was probably quite cheap for it.

As for the location, I would have preferred if it was closer to the entrance of the Labyrinth...The shrine– in other words, within the vicinity of the Emperor's Palace, I would be able to use the buildings that belonged to the Emperor's Palace and those that were associated with the Labyrinth as my residence. Although the Eastern District was as prosperous as a city by itself, there were extremely rich guys living there. I decided to pass on that, since the prices would naturally get much higher.

On the other hand, if I went to a fairly cheap location...it would be a problem,

since areas like the Port Town on the west side had worse public security than the east. The Fort personnel were in complete power of their eastern territories. In other words, the west was where the Thieves Guild and the Slums were located. I couldn't imagine anyone wanting to live in the Western District just because it was cheap. The public security of the area had to be good if I was thinking about living together with Grace.

Speaking of being close to the school, there is a positive aspect to it from a security point of view. Its economy is prosperous and there are a lot of people with a high level of education and knowledge in the area. It is also natural for the Emperor to have many soldiers patrol the area in order to maintain peace.

If I were to live somewhere, it might as well be in the Eastern District...It was fine to consider buying a house with money, since the prices were already considerably high.

I might come to like the interior of this house later on, too. Well then.

We entered the house after Kyson opened the door.

From the entrance hall, I could see stairs that continued on to the second floor, as well as a passageway to the inside. Although there were stairs at the end of the passageway that lead towards the basement...I decided to look around the first floor first.

"The dining area is over on my right, and over on my left is a guest room. The living room, kitchen, and a restroom are past this corridor."

Although there was a clear view of the garden from the guest room, which was facing the front of the street...well, the garden was in a terrible state. Apparently, it was possible to go directly to the dining area and the guest room from the kitchen. There was also a door at the back of the kitchen. We peeked through the back door before heading out to the back of the house. A pool of water, which had been pulled up from nearby aqueducts and waterways, was located right next to the door. This was, without a doubt, convenient in various ways.

It was fine to just draw water with water magic, and in my case, even doing hard labor was trivial.

The toilet drew water from the aqueducts. It was quite sanitary to let the water flow into the small tank and let it flush. Boundary City, with its own water

and sewage system, was an amazing place for its culture. However, speaking of the sewage system the Boundary City has, it only flowed downwards, into the lower levels of the Labyrinth, via aqueducts. This was a bit of a problem.

The problem was that, due to the Labyrinth's nature of the gathering elements of a similar nature, it created an unpleasant area in the lower levels.

It was also known as the Corrupt Desolate Lake. As long as I didn't have any business there, I didn't want to go to such a poisonous area... Though there were also areas that required one to pass through that place. Regardless of whether I needed to pass through it, its nature was bad.

If I were to describe the place, the Kanji used in its name was more or less correct.

It was a sludge lake with narrow scaffolds interspersed through it. It was a lovely area where Tar Demons would ambush you from inside of the sludge. Even if you were carefully watching the ground, there were feathered, human-faced insects and monsters similar to them that were flying around high in the sky.

It became quite a traumatic experience to Beginner Players, since they would be poisoned, taken by surprise, and suffer terribly until they were slaughtered. Although BFO had been called a VR previously, it was, perhaps, more suited to that name now.

"What about this door?"

After I shook off some unpleasant memories, we went through the door that led to the toilet.

"Here is the bathhouse and the bathroom."

This was the bathroom? This was always better than going to a public bath and bathing yourself there. Just like the toilet, it seemed that water was drawn from the aqueducts that were connected to the reservoir. The bathtub was rather large and relaxing. Even if one didn't know magic used for daily life, it looked like it was necessary to place magic stones into the depressions in the wall in order to boil the water.

Speaking of magic stones, they were crystals that could be created by extracting them from harvested Demon parts.

Since they had a high affinity with magic, they could easily store specific spells if one used the inscribing skill.

Inscribing wasn't a skill that was too difficult to utilize, and a magician could use it in various ways if they were the one casting it.

However, since the magical tools that were embedded with complicated and advanced patterns were all handmade, they were astonishingly expensive. Most commoners would have never seen them before.

Since magic stones were not used through a special skill and were just a way to store Mana, there were various applications for them, creating a constant demand for them as consumable goods. However, a heat circulation bath, huh? ...It might not be that bad. Was 75 Kilig a month cheap for this?

"Another guest room and the master bedroom is on the second floor. There's also a terrace and an attic."

We turned around and went upstairs, following Kyson. There were three guest rooms. The hallway was quite long.

A terrace and the servants living quarters were connected to the master bedroom.

"And the basement?"

"I think it would be useful as a storage room."

A storage room, was it? When we went down into the basement, we saw that the walls were made of solid stone. –Wasn't it fine to establish a transfer magic formation here? The attic was also usually used as a storage room.

"What do you think about this, Grace?"

"A wide kitchen is convenient for kitchen work. After that is the toilet and the bath? It seems like the aqueducts' role is to recycle wastewater?"

"That's true. It will be fine if we shut the rooms we won't use. Can you handle it?"

"Please leave it to me."

Grace responded brightly. She's reliable.

"What do you think, Theodore-sama?"

"I want to go see if there are any other attractive places."

Whether or not he understood, Kyson appeared to be happy as he asked that...Let's at least compare it with some other houses.

Although we went to many houses afterwards, none of them suited my needs very well. In the end, I chose the house with a rent of 75 Kilig per month.

//

If it was unreasonable to downgrade it and it looked like I would be capable of doing it, I will consider buying the house.

--

Chapter 12

--

Chapter 12 – At The Boundary City’s Guild

Since the procedure for leasing was completed after signing the contract, we went to collect the carriage that was stored at the stable near the gate. When we returned to the house, we transferred our luggage from the carriage into the house.

Speaking of the luggage, it consisted of things like clothing, cookware and dining ware wrapped in cloth, as well as the foodstuffs we had brought but did not consume during the trip.

This would be all of our supplies for the next few days, and we could probably stay here with the minimum amount of cooking supplies.

In regards to important furniture like beds, desks, and sofas, those will be addressed at another time. It will be fine if Grace and I slowly explore the town and go shopping.

As to why we were going around town with Rosetta today, it was because we had already tidied up our business from before.

After that, the next thing to do would be to head over to Perezford School and take care of the procedures for enrollment? With Grace acting as the carriage driver, we rode from the house to the nearby school.

The school was a historical building. It was surrounded by a tall fence entangled with ivy and was still in good condition, giving off an old-fashioned feeling. Although there were several buildings built within the grounds, the one we were heading to this time was just the administrative office.

“Can I help you?”

“I’d like help with the enrollment procedures, please. This is my letter of introduction.”

After submitting the introduction letter written by Dad, the staff member nodded and examined the sealed letter.

“Will you fill in the necessary information on this document, please?”

Following the staff member’s guidance, which was given in a businesslike tone, I submitted the document after filling in the necessary information. The staff member looked it over and inclined their head.

“Do you not wish to enter the dorm?”

“It isn’t necessary because I have a house within the city. That doesn’t mean I’ll receive a noble’s education though.”

“Is that so?”

Whether or not the staff member had asked merely to confirm, they did not inquire further. The enrollment fee to attend Perezford came out to be 500 Kilig.

The process was rather simple. It’s not like I was looking forward to filling out paperwork though. The procedures today were sufficient. It was fine to leave other matters aside for another day.

“What should we do next?”

“Go to the Guild, right? We have to return the horses to the Count and submit this request to him.”

We headed towards our next destination as I replied to Rossetta, who had been waiting inside the carriage.

The reason we were heading towards the Guild was not only to submit the request, but to handle various affairs like the introduction of the alchemist and the procurement of magic stones to use in the house’s bathroom as well.

“You will also obtain permission to dive down into the labyrinth, right?”

“Well...that’s right.”

Although Rossetta wasn’t talking about how to handle the house’s maintenance fees, since she didn’t know my personal budget, my actions seemed to be within the extent of her expectations.

“Even if it’s just a little bit, would it be okay for you to show me how you

fight?"

"...Only if you will agree to let me do this."

"It will be fine if you agree, provided that you're able to talk with me."

"That's why you must agree."

Rossetta closed her eyes after I immediately answered.

Consent? What must we agree on? Was I able to interact with her in a reasonable manner because I was a child?

Although it was probably fine if I was a normal child, I was no longer normal. It didn't mean I was too conceited. I was seeking power because I believed that I didn't have enough of it after all.

Although I didn't have plans to dive into the labyrinth for the moment...Well, that's fine, I guess?

Grace's axe was stored in the carriage as well, and it was troublesome to allow Rossetta to accompany me again for a chat on another day.

Even if there was unease in the upper levels, there weren't any problems.

"Rather than that, what does Rossetta normally do?"

"Ah, me? As Risa's child, what do you think I do?"

At that, Rossetta smiled and placed her hand on her cheek. I wonder why she seems happy?

Well, she dove into the labyrinth with Mom when they were classmates and could afford to do that with their flexible schedules.

Dad had a lot of influence over various things regarding her, and it was expected that she would ask me for a favor.

I wonder? If I spoke about having great success as an Adventurer, I knew it would be more than just having the time and money to do it.

As for the possibilities, she could be a government official, a staff member for the Adventurer's Guild, a teacher at Perezford...or—

"A leader of the Thieves Guild, right?"

"Why would that be true..."

"Well, you seem to be well-connected."

It seems that she wasn't aiming to land a jackpot.

(TL: by establishing a connection with Theo)

"Geez. I'm teaching at Perezford, you know. I'm in charge of Healing Magic."

"So it was like that?"

Although she pouted in dissatisfaction, she neither appeared too dignified nor powerful...I felt that she had become widely known as a Priest while she was active within the labyrinth, then settled down in Perezford as a teacher, and was currently training her juniors.

The affluence of becoming widely known was something to be satisfied with. The skills of a Priest were specialized and did not rely on the quality of Mana upon activation, so skilled Priests were quite rare.

By the way, since a Battlemage's Circulation Refinement was something like a bonus, its healing effects were extremely outclassed by an expert Priest. Although I was also capable of using beginner healing magic, mine was only useful as emergency or temporary treatment.

While we were talking about such things, we arrived at our destination. Since the carriage had stopped, we got out of it and saw a plaza with the Guild and the shrine. Grace smiled at me.

"Theodore-sama, we have arrived."

"Mm. Thanks."

The plaza was crowded with various races. The ones that stood out were the lightly-equipped warriors and magicians, elves with bows on their backs, and Adventurers with spears called hawkmen. There were a lot of people who came to place a request with the Guild and send prayers to the shrine's goddess...Well, anyways, it was a place where people gathered. They permitted us to leave our carriage at the stable, and we headed inside the Guild, which was next to the shrine.

"Welcome. What can the guild do for you today?"

A smiling, young female receptionist greeted us.

"Various things. The first thing is related to a request."

“Let’s hear it then.”

After sharing the details of the request and the person to contact, the receptionist lady gathered the documents with the necessary information. By the way, paper was relatively common in certain parts of the city.

Although the paper was not necessarily pure white and soft, wide-scale magic formations and magic stones were necessary for skilled Magic Craftsmen to produce it. The paper was compounded from Wood Magic, Water Magic, and Earth Magic, since it was created from plants, and the production method had been established as a skill.

From Kagehisa’s knowledge, until papermaking progressed and it became possible to produce large quantities of paper, it had been a high class good on Earth. It appeared that this world’s magic civilization’s skill level was quite advanced.

“By the way, did the Adventurers calling themselves Forest Bird leave a message for Theodore Gartner?”

“Aah, those guys, huh? They said that they would come by once the day is over.”

We would head towards the Labyrinth during the early mid-afternoon, was it? Rather than their usual selves, Forest Bird’s laxness seemed more like that of an Adventurer’s.

“Understood. Although they have left a message, would you please tell them that I was here earlier, if they return?”

“Is it a designated request?”

“No, it’s something more personal. I have a letter of introduction from a person called Beline.”

“–Beline?”

The woman’s hand, which had been moving her quill without pausing, suddenly stopped.

“...Do you know her?”

“Y-yeah, I do.”

...The receptionist lady smiled as I handed her the letter of introduction, though I got the feeling that she was twitching slightly...Well, let's stop asking for details.

As she looked over it, the receptionist lady nodded.

"...An alchemist, huh? Understood. I'll try to look up the information we have here."

"Before that, please give us the registration documents for Adventurers. For me and her."

"The two of you? Is it true that the two of you defeated a swarm of ants?"

"Yes."

I had the body of a child after all, and even though that wasn't rare, I couldn't see Adventurers taking the trouble to party with children. I understood that it seemed suspicious...

As I had thought, would it have been better to go shopping for a Magician's robe, a staff, and the like? Even so, the receptionist lady surely wouldn't refuse us for that reason, so we continued to register without delay. The receptionist lady nodded as she confirmed the documents.

"Understood. Please fill in this form over here. Please tell me if you require someone to write for you."

"It's fine."

"It's fine for me as well."

The two of us filled in the necessary information on the form. Even if I said it was important information, it wasn't actually anything important enough to hear about. Your name, what you excel in, and your current lodgings. These things were enough. If they asked for too many details, the Adventurer's original purpose would be left out.

As for us, I excelled in Magic and Grace excelled in close combat. About this much information was fine.

It also said that, if I so desired, I could be introduced to an Adventurer's party or I could post a request for specialized Adventurers. Information was necessary for

things like that after all.

"I have confirmed it. I will now move onto the explanation of things you need to be aware of."

Adventurers have a guaranteed status in a country. The worthy actions of their predecessor's achievements was something to bear in mind. In regards to the guild's honor, there were cases where they submitted requests to capture or subjugate those who dishonored its dignity and credibility, etc.

Although there wasn't a fixed quota, it was recommended to visit if one had too much free time on their hands. There were various things that were assessed by the Guild, such as the kinds of achievements left on someone's records and what kind of work they were suitable for.

Although there weren't any clear rankings, if one became distinguished, then they would become a topic of gossip. If you had achievements, the Guild would also write a letter of introduction for you...which the Guild used to provide services and accommodate you on various things. That's why, in order to become acknowledged, you had to handle the jobs in earnest.

However, in the case of Boundary City's Adventurers, they had the right amount of information necessary to indicate their true strength. Right? How deep into the labyrinth would they get?

The further down you went, into the lower levels, the higher likelihood that Adventurers with skills surpassing yours would appear.

"The information from the previous documents will be copied onto this magic slate."

The thing the receptionist lady brought out from under the desk was a metal slate embedded with small magic stones. It had the same purpose as a name tag in the military. It was an Adventurer's proof of identity.

The main point of filling it with magic was to embed it with information, such as one's name and what they specialize in, via the magic stones.

"This magic slate will have your name embedded into it. Be careful not to lose it, since it will become your proof of identification as an Adventurer. If, by chance, you notice that you've dropped it within the labyrinth, please recover it, as long as you are capable of doing so.

"Understood."

The two of us nodded. It was still ignorant to express that you had managed to lose it though.

If it was required, it was easy to look up the identity of those who died. You identified them by using the slate.

"Well, with this, the two of you are now Adventurers...and it's required to take a few short lessons in order to get permission to enter the large labyrinth. Please handle those procedures with the person at the window over there. Regarding the contents of Beline's letter, she can pass the information over to the two of you when those lessons end."

It meant that we would finally be able to dive into the Labyrinth once those lessons ended.

It was something I cared deeply about.

I lifted my head up from the metal slate and saw a group of young, male Adventurers that were doing something. Although they noticed that I seemed to be evaluating them, they headed off in the direction away from me. With their appearance, I thought that they would be easy to deal with...it should be fine if it doesn't become troublesome.

--

Chapter 13

--

Chapter 13 – Sneaking Into The Labyrinth

Even though I hadn't thought that things like maps of the Boundary Labyrinth were that important until now, I ended up making maps on the occasions where our explorations led into unknown areas, rather than using them normally and semi-permanently in the labyrinth.

Its usability was dependent on the person, rather than the circumstance. Even if they had a limited consumption, it didn't mean that they weren't useful and that there weren't any means of using them. The way these maps were used was precisely due to their limited number of uses.

In other words, you could use them to travel to a compatible hunting ground and avoid unsuitable ones.

They were also used when you needed a quick escape route from an area that had materials that you had to gather at any cost. For reasons like these, a supply and demand relationship had been established. However, with the exception of high class goods, if the supply and demand wasn't balanced, many of the maps that were sold would be outdated. For that reason, many Adventurers were given requests to create maps during the new moon, and people who took these requests had begun to appear within BFO. Those guys were the so-called BTOs.
(TN: BTO = Built-to-Order)

In the current situation—the supply was provided by those who continued to create and sell maps for levels that they were capable of steadily exploring by themselves.

At the Guild entrance, there were Adventurers who claimed to sell maps of the deeper levels. If newcomers forced maps onto somebody, well, they might manage to make a living.

"I'd like to buy a map, is that fine?"

“Anytime! Which map do you need?”

When I asked, he brightened and answered me.

“For now, a map of the underground’s first floor will do.”

Areas of the first floor in the underground labyrinth didn’t change structurally. I understood that the map this guy drew would be enough for reference when I looked at it.

“If it’s for that, then just this is fine.”

“Is that so?”

“Areas of the first floor don’t change. I’m a businessman. If you like it, then it would actually help if you buy it off of me. I’ll end up unable to use it in three days.”

Conversely, he was saying that he was confident that we would buy it from him if he let us look at the areas of the first floor.

When he let us look at it, I saw that it was quite a detailed map.

Rather than saying that he thought well of the people who used maps, I will say that I picked up the friendly vibe of a beginner player.

Well, I’ll buy four maps that lead up to the fifth floor, since I’m in favor of it. The total price for all of them was 16 Kilig.

We headed out while gazing at each of the maps we had bought.

“Ara, you’ve bought a map.”

“It’s because of what you said after accompanying us, Rossetta-san.”

When we reunited with Rossetta, who had been waiting outside the Guild, she mentioned that.

I thought that, if it were just Grace and I, it would have been fine even if we were caught in a perfect power-play in the lower levels.

I had just considered trying to go there carefully, since it would become troublesome if we were to get carried away.

“Let’s see, speaking of staying true to the basics, I do get a good impression from you.”

Although, I didn’t know if it was basic or not...I was just doing the standard

things normally.

“Though there isn’t anything standard about such an appearance, you know.”

Like always, I wore servant clothing and Grace wore her maid outfit.

“Will you buy a robe, even if it’s leather armor?”

“It’s troublesome to come here again later. I want to choose it carefully since I hate having something temporarily.”

“Grace, what about you?”

When Rossetta asked about her equipment,

“Is this outfit no good? I thought it was efficient and easy to move in.”

“It might be efficient, but...”

After Rossetta pointed out our clothing, Grace inclined her head in curiously.

...In reality, if a woman wore such armor, it would just inhibit her movement. It would be unfortunate if your armor was destroyed by your own movement and power because it was only an obstruction.

Whether or not she had remembered Grace’s race, it seemed like Rossetta had given up on persuading her.

“Besides that, Theodore-sama’s clothing suits him quite well.”

“Well, it’s not an issue of it suiting him or not?”

Rossetta looked at my appearance with a puzzled look.

No...well, it was a fact that Grace could work, and even though I had such an atmosphere, it was unexpectedly natural.

Mom, who had taught Grace how to write and count, had been quite the carefree person, and it was normal for her to be away from the house of Count Gartner. Yet, one reason for coming here was because Grace had been isolated from the world.

It seemed like Rossetta’s intuition as a school teacher was good at least, and wasn’t taking diligent actions in regards to the Labyrinth fundamental? With that, I had decided to go and make preparations, even though I didn’t have any plans to go explore too far today. We headed towards the market adjacent

to the plaza. The market in front of the shrine had goods that were delivered and produced by the Guild, and the goods handled here were meant for the Adventurers who were going to enter the Labyrinth. The minimum equipment needed was said to be canteens, a backpack, portable rations, and emergency rations. We took out my staff and her axe from inside the carriage that was left at the stable, and after we laid out a cloth that had a transfer magic formation on it inside of the carriage, we finally departed to the labyrinth. The Labyrinth's entrance was in the shrine next to the guild.

"Which god do we pray to at this shrine?"

"It's Shuas, the Moon Goddess."

Shuas was a Moon God who governed over the effects of the waxing and waning of the moon in the labyrinth, as well as the safety of journeys and voyages.

With her qualities, Shuas was popular among the Adventurers. There wasn't anybody she had a bad affinity with amongst the other Gods and, because of her nature as a peaceful goddess, it seemed appropriate that her shrine was located in this place that gathered many races.

After stepping into the shrine, which was lined with large pillars, what appeared was an altar, along with the figures of priests and shrine maidens, standing in front of the Goddess Statue.

There was a big hole in the center of the shrine, accompanied by a spiral passageway granting passage to the lower levels.

After the three of us, who had accompanied each other thus far, went down that long spiraling staircase, we arrived at an open area that had the shape of a circle.

This gaping mouth was the entrance to the Labyrinth...along with a stele that emitted a green shine.

Although the stele was something that let people transfer to areas they had visited before, there wasn't any reaction when I tried to approach it.

It was useless, huh? Well, it couldn't be helped, though I had considered that it might be possible to go into the lower levels that I visited during my time in BFO. It probably didn't work that way, since I was unable to even open my inventory.

From the corner of my eyes, I could see a group of Adventurers approach it.

Perhaps they had come down to the open area at the bottom of the stairs earlier. Their party was composed of eight people, whose ages ranged from the early to late 20s. This pattern...was not that great. They seemed like genuine adventurers.

They passed by me and vanished into the large labyrinth, using the stele to transfer.

What was with them? I didn't really do anything to those guys just now. I just took a normal glance at them. They had just transferred from the stele when we had arrived down here.

It's just that, I had looked at them one by one. It wasn't pleasant for us to overlap with each other.

...Should I urge Rossetta to be cautious? I didn't know her true strength. If I thought about her relation with Mom and her status, it would be troublesome if she got injured in a surprise attack, even though I didn't think Rossetta was weak.

"Be a bit wary of those guys from earlier. Though, it's fine if you don't cross your bridges until you come to them."

After informing them, the two tightened their expressions.

As we waited to descend the staircase, I recalled that it was normal to trick new players into using the stele to enter the labyrinth.

There were many stories about novice Adventurers being ambushed and mugged within the deeper levels. In the game, the lower levels became a PK area.

"Isn't it better to discuss that another day?"

"It's useless to discuss it another day if we're aiming to explore today, right?"

Truth be told, in reality, it was rather difficult to target a specific opponent. Since you could transfer to any area you liked with the stele, as long as they didn't know where you were heading, it would be unlikely for you to be pursued by someone.

On the other hand, new players always had to pass through this level. Conversely...when you had advanced deep enough into the labyrinth, it was said that the worry of being targeted by such people would decrease.

Just how would those guys discern our intent?
Would they guess correctly because of my clothing, the fact that I was a kid, or
that we were new people who had just finished registering?
I didn't feel the need to care if the others would fall into temptation. Being
aware of crime prevention was a separate issue. If only there were enough of
this conscience on hand, I could only say that it would no longer be our problem,
as people who had just happened to be there by chance.

"Rossetta-san—Should I give up on this path just because Goblins may
appear?"

"That's quite extreme...I wonder who you get that from?"

"Mom was mom, and I am me. If they get in the way, I'll just get rid of them."

After Grace removed her limiter by kissing her ring, we continued into the
entrance.

There probably wasn't any need to be cautious of an attack from the guys from
earlier in this area. The stairs were easily visible as soon as you entered, and you
could easily escape by running outside.

Even though the entrance was very wide, the passageway soon became low
and narrow, with paths branching off in every direction. The white stone walls
were made of the same materials used for the buildings within the heart of
Termuilles.

I had already memorized the passageways in this area and didn't need a map. I
planned to journey to the fifth floor using the shortest route, since I didn't have
anything important to do.

"Light Ball."

Instead of using a lantern, I illuminated the surroundings using the Level 2
Beginner Light Magic, Light Ball. It was self-explanatory. It was Magic that could
create a ball that emitted light.

"Can you not use night Vision Magic?"

"I can."

Rossetta tilted her head when I replied.

Although I understood what she wanted to say, what I used depended on the situation.

"If you can, then why aren't you using it? Won't you end up leaving a trail?"

"The Monsters around here are Goblins, Kobolds, and Killer Ants, right?"

We proceeded into the next passageway using Light Ball.

After we had walked, the shadows of two Goblins were cast onto the ground when the ball of light flew around a corner ahead of us.

"...I see."

Rossetta raised her voice in admiration.

The moment their shadows appeared, Grace stepped towards the Goblins and struck down at them with her axe, while the Goblins were letting out a growl. The sound of something splashing could be heard from beyond the corner.

As one of them, looking surprised, readied itself, I reduced it to ashes with a chantless Fireball. Even if I fought face-to-face with them, such an insignificant opponent was no threat. I wasn't worried at all when it came to fighting them openly.

The only troublesome things would be their spawn points, sudden encounters, and the like. My movement speed would decrease, since I needed to use light and remain cautious.

The only problem might be that Adventurer group? I hoped that they had decent judgement and decent consciences.

"If something happens, I'll be your shield. I have often carried a bow."

As for Grace, who was released from her limiter...although she wasn't particularly bad in any area, painful things were still painful.

Aah...I don't like this! I was getting worried just by imagining it. It was a situation where I didn't want anything to happen, even if those guys ran here using the shortest route.

I squinted my eyes, and stared into the darkness of the Labyrinth where the light had yet to reach.

Chapter 14

--

Chapter 14 – Map Utilization

“I deeply apologize, Theodore-sama. Did I make you feel unpleasant?”

“–Yeah.”

Grace looked back at me, seeming slightly troubled.

I put my hand on my head as I spoke, wearing an expression that seemed to say, ‘It was useless, huh?’

Perhaps I had made a hideous face. Let’s compose ourselves a bit. I didn’t mean to make Grace feel anxious.

“Well...it’s not that Grace made me angry. I’m more worried about things like who should be the Tank. I’m thinking it should be me this time.”

“Understood.”

Grace closed her eyes and bowed slightly...A Tank, huh?

Perhaps it was because I couldn’t do anything when mom was around. Grace probably felt the same as me and couldn’t forgive herself for that.

That was probably why she was trying to protect me – because she was trying to do what she was capable of doing.

Even if Grace injured me, I don’t think temporary pain is outside my limits, since I can immediately heal myself.

That’s why, even if it was Grace, I will always volunteer to be the Tank. If I were to leave out my emotions, then her suggestion would have been correct. Looking at it from her perspective, I think it was natural to be confused, since we suddenly ended up arguing at the place where we had just battled.

I didn’t feel this way when Grace fought in front of me when we had fought the Killer Ants, though.

Oslo, the guys this time around, and the ants...If I were to say what was different

about them, it was just that the Killer Ants would follow their instincts and habits. Conversely, considering the malice that was directed towards us...I can't forgive it either way.

Yeah. My head understands it, so I should be composed. I wasn't overtaken by these feelings.

Although I did not hesitate to get rid of them, I couldn't help but feel depressed, since humans have many bonds with their partners. Why won't these bonds leave me alone?

"Hey, Theodore? Although you've voiced your opinion, you've been cautious about those guys since the beginning, right?"

"Yeah, somewhat."

"Even though I wasn't so sure about buying a map, the reason you seemed so certain about getting one...it can't be this, can it?"

"It was also that."

It would be fine if nothing happened. Using the map, I showed Rossetta the routes we could take to progress through the labyrinth steadily.

If those Adventurers were planning anything suspicious, I could narrow down the places we were more likely to be ambushed by looking at the map.

"The places where those guys would be likely to carry out an ambush are here and here. This place as well."

As I returned the Light Ball to my hand, I gradually understood why Rossetta's expressions became cloudy after I pointed on the map.

"One of their favorite locations is the third floor. If you continue towards the stairs and the stele, this passageway intersects that one. This passageway is quite long and is the most suspicious one. You would be in a bow's line of fire, and if a person was on standby in this small room behind the passageway ahead of it, you could get attacked from both sides, even if you try to escape."

While I was explaining and pointing with my fingers at the T-shape the passages formed, Rossetta somehow became sulky.

"Isn't this far from being fundamental? Exactly who taught you such things?"

"The one who said they were devoted to the fundamentals wasn't me, and it's troubling if you sulk."

From seeing the places that were suitable for PKing, and considering the layout of the labyrinth, it was enough to remain cautious. I will just do things normally, just as I did during the Game, when I was Kagehisa. It wouldn't be difficult at all, since I had the know-how and theories related to it.

"Haah...geez. Given the chance, I thought that you would act like a protector who would save people in a cool manner. The two of you seem more like Thieves and are quite capable, contrary to my expectations."

"You have been thinking about such a thing?"

"I have been thinking about it...so?"

Rossetta pouted her lips in dissatisfaction. A child, huh?

"What do you mean by 'so'?"

"Nevermind. As for Theodore-kun, concerning this ambush. What are you planning to do about it?"

"Well, we'll end up taking a detour, so if we take a detour and keep going... look. We will be able to come out behind their Archer. They've seen me holding a map in my hands, out in the open. If they think that I'm a Beginner, they will probably be under the impression that we will be taking the shortest route."

Rather than them seeing us, I had shown it to them.

If they were going to target us since we were new, they would be confident that we would move through Theory Street. Didn't they try to teach new people about the harsh places they could come across and where it was easy to start out at?

"For that reason, if they have an Archer here, in all likelihood, they will pre-emptively ambush you without giving away their presence."

"...Somehow, those guys have become quite pitiful."

Rossetta shook her head and sighed.

"Hah, it's fine already. I still haven't seen your true strength, so I'll also be going with you. Also, if I were to overlook Adventurers that robbed people as a

side job, I would get scolded.”

While we were talking, Rossetta said that. I inclined my head, as she didn't appear to have any weapons.

“My weapons are hand-to-hand combat and healing magic. Then there is --- Support Magic. There isn't a need for you to worry about it.”

Support and Healing Magic, huh...? I still had plenty of dirty cards up my sleeves. Grappling was also a choice, since I understood the constitution of living organisms.

It didn't seem like there was a need to worry about her...Let's keep exploring the labyrinth. For now, we'll dispose of the Goblins we defeated.

“Extraction.”

I cast my Rank 6 Darkness Magic as I raised my hand towards the Goblin corpses that were rolling around on the ground.

A red fog rose up from the bodies of the Goblins and gathered in my palm. The fog thickened and became a red crystal as large as a grain of rice.

As for the goblin corpses that had had their magic stone essence extracted, they vanished, as if they had melted into the ground. Well...it was a scene that I had gotten used to seeing.

“You can even cast the Magic Stone Extraction spell.”

“Yeah, but I'm worried that having Goblins as an opponent won't be profitable at all.”

Yet, it was highly possible that I would have to use this Magic. I wanted to confirm the behavior of our surroundings ahead of time by doing experiments and seeing what happened. It was different from the outside, so the disposal of dead bodies in the labyrinth had to be done here.

Although the dead bodies of Demons would naturally turn into magic stone essence, the labyrinth in Termuilles ends up absorbing those dead bodies.

In other words, if the essence was extracted, you would become unable to strip the bodies of their raw materials...and regular Goblins didn't have any. Having said that, you had to cast this magic to collect a large amount of it, although there wasn't much value in extracting the essence from them...They

were rather unprofitable opponents.

In particular, they weren't even targets of Guild subjugations, since Goblins didn't leave the labyrinth, so they never affected livestock, crops, and the like. Other places had a slightly different status.

Due to this, even if we took our time to progress, we wouldn't gain any profits from this area. Let's keep moving while collecting Dimension Stones that drop on the roadside.

//

Rossetta lunged at the Kobalts that came to strike us with their clubs. After warding off one of their attacks, we dealt with them by knocking them down, which made them roll around on the floor, before stomping on their spines. There wasn't any hesitation in her follow-up attack. Her elegant martial arts resembled flowing water. Thanks to this, she was barely injured. Grace finished up without drinking too much blood, and my Staff was in good health as well. I was capable of winning with just my Toujutsu.

"Speaking of the detour, is it that way?"

Rossetta asked me as she indicated the path with her left hand.

"Yea, that's right. When this point is nearby, we will turn off the lights."

We continued to walk towards the stairs of the third floor, while we crushed the Demons that sporadically appeared along the way without too much hardship. The Demons that appeared on the higher levels appeared to be weak, and there weren't very many of them.

"Theodore-sama, we've found a Dimension Stone."

Grace had found a piece of grain-sized Dimension Stone that was dropped in the corner of the passageway. You could collect Dimension Stones by just walking through the passageways, without needing to enter the small rooms on the sides.

There were a lot of small items like the Dimension Stone that Grace had picked up and was holding.

Anyhow, since there wasn't enough Dimension Stones for us to return and transfer items, there was a need for us to continue collecting them as we moved around the labyrinth. However, even though the three of us needed them to

escape, we could probably get the necessary amount. If we found another Dimension Stone, it would be fine to transfer materials like the ant jaws and the Kobalt tails. Making sure we had the necessary number of Dimension Stones at the last minute before returning was rather difficult.

For transferring from the stele, if your party had more than seven people, the number of Dimension Stones needed would increase. That was why it was normal to form a party of six people at most to dive down into the labyrinth.

We gradually approached our target area. I cast night-vision magic after making the Light Ball vanish and proceeded through the passageway after erasing our traces.

Then we arrived at this location. When I looked into the area from one of the corners, I saw two men who were looking towards the back of the passageway. A piece of cloth was wrapped around their heads to hide their faces, and their bodies were wrapped in a cloak. One was carrying a bow, while the other one had a Staff.

...A Magician, huh? He was probably the one that cast night-vision magic on the Archer.

There could only be one reason for them to hide their faces and wear that attire. It was to ensure their safety when they ran away. That way, they would have room for excuses. It seems like they were used to doing this.

Well then...no matter how I look at it, the black one would be the one to launch the attack...and, even if it was by chance, it would be troublesome if I made a mistake while launching a pre-emptive attack. For now, we should test their reactions with a sure-kill spell.

The Spell I used to attack them was a Rank 4 Wind Spell, Airburst. The spell fired off a mass of compressed air, making a large sound and creating a raging shockwave. It would fish out the guys who were waiting to ambush the passageway ahead of the two, while at the same time depriving them of their combat power.

Perhaps because they were equipped with night vision, those guys reacted to the light of the small magic circle and looked backwards...although they were too slow to do anything.

"Blow them away."

A large sound rang out and a shockwave burst forward, right in front of those guy's faces.

-- --

Chapter 15

--

Chapter 15 – Sneak Attack

“GUOOOOOOOH!?”

The men tumbled to the ground, unable to keep their footing, and dropped their weapons so that they could cover their ears with both their hands. However, they had crashed into the wall after being splendidly blown away, so surely there was a large amount of damage to their ears.

“GAAH!? Why the hell are those bastards coming from behind us!?”

The archer yelled that out hysterically while grimacing from the sharp pain in his ears.

Well...that line confirmed their guilt.

“Hey! What was that sound just now!?”

“Damn it, it’s that brat! Kill them!”

Soon, after thinking that it had become noisy, a torchlight shined from beyond the passageway. A torch, huh? If the person that could use magic had to be over there for that pincer attack to work, then the guys over here had to have ensured another method to see, other than their night vision. Speaking of relying on tools, in other words, it was saying that their fatal weakness would be exposed.

“Flame Absorb.”

Rank 3 Darkness Magic. A thin, radiant orb of dark violet was emitted towards the opposite end of the passageway. It was a counter-spell for flames. The flame sustained by the torch was absorbed by the darkness orb.

“Impos.....”

It was akin to suddenly blindfolding those guys. Of course, they could neither

use their martial arts nor could they counterattack. Grace and Rossetta charged at them.

Grace's movements were simple; there was no waste in her actions.

Using only the momentum from rushing forward with her small frame, she grasped the man's throat, who tumbled to the ground as she broke both of his legs with a slash from her arm, and knocked him into the wall, as if she was disposing of a piece of trash.

Looking at her, it was as if she had only given him a pat. Just because she didn't use her axe, it didn't mean that she was being lenient. She probably loathed needlessly spilling human blood.

As for Rossetta, she was fighting quite elegantly.

She knocked down the opponent who had run at her at the beginning, and just as she was about to completely seal his movements with a trample, she lightly struck the confused man's chest with her fingertips and easily activated her magic.

"Rotten Blood."

It was a support spell derived from the water detoxification spell, Clear Blood. It produced a toxin within the target's bloodstream.

"Gubuh!?"

Although I didn't know what it felt like to be on the receiving end of Rotten Blood, the man raised a muffled complaint, clutched his chest and collapsed to his knees. Before he fell down, Rossetta stepped on his head. I didn't know if he was hovering between life or death, but for now, his movements were restricted.

"Damn it! How the hell did it end up like this-"

Caught up in the extreme confusion, the man wasn't allowed to finish the rest of his sentence. Grace kicked his chest and sent him flying parallel to the ground. The large man's body collided with the wall.

"G-Go burn in hell-!"

The magician tried to wield his Staff and cast a Fireball.

"Too late."

The body of the Magician was pierced through by the spear of lightning that came from the expanded magic circle at my fingertips.

A spark of bright green light flashed in the labyrinth passage and was accompanied by the sound of something bursting open.

It was a Rank 4 Lightning Magic, Electro Lance. If your opponents were human, this spell had the power to kill them. Although Magicians had quite a high resistance, they would still fall down after receiving a single attack and become unable to move.

Not all Magicians felt the need to hide their cards up their sleeves, like using chantless magic or magic circles, so it was impossible to predict if capturing them would be easy. You could even go so far as to say that there was a possibility of them using magic after being incapacitated, depending on the condition of their body and if they were still conscious. There was certainly a need to bury them. Although I had a spell up my sleeve that could put them to sleep, it was unreliable. If one of them understood that type of magic, it would be possible for them to resist, depending on the strength of their mind.

Rossetta's healing magic was a different kind of magic. Since it affected the body, direct contact was necessary, and it was a powerful interference ability that ignored resistances.

"Y-You're joking...right?...It was done...instantaneously?"

The defeated archer's voice leaked out. It was possible that he had received damage to his eardrums, and although I was uncertain of his pronunciation, I was able to catch his words.

"Light Bind."

"Hii?!"

When the archer was restrained, the battle ended underwhelmingly. There wasn't anyone who could stand up and come at us. I wasn't concerned as to whether those guys were dead or alive. After all, it was all the same if they surrendered.

In order to confirm whether or not the restrained archer had allies outside the labyrinth, I decided it was necessary to revive one of them, two at most.

As to how their allies suffered while under the effects of the night vision, I had thoroughly seen through them. I'll take the opportunity to express my thanks for

what they did to us when we get outside. The guys who would vainly meddle in our business will decrease and people pulling off similar tricks will quiet down as well.

“Y-You’re wrong! We are just-”

The man rolling on the floor screamed out an excuse.
I wondered what I should say. There wasn’t anything wrong with arranging preparations with just this.
For these guys to be so frantic meant that a number of the criminals within the large labyrinth couldn’t avoid capital punishment. Since interrogations were conducted with the use of lie detecting magic, they couldn’t talk their way out of their crimes.

When I stared down at them silently, the man who had looked at me didn’t know where to direct his sight. When they finally got serious, they glared in our direction.

“Th-That’s right! We didn’t have any plans to kill you! You guys aren’t injured, so isn’t it fine to ignore us!?”

“...I won’t say it twice. Stop talking.”

“...”

When I said that while a magic circle floated above my palm, the man finally went silent. Now that they were at my mercy, they were pretending to be weak, since their attempt at thievery had failed. The fact that they targeted new people and begged for their lives was fine, but they were completely unpleasant individuals.

Was their goal money or pleasure? Was their method intimidation or murder? These things had no relation to us at all.

As for what those guys were planning to do, they could have only chosen one or two paths at most, considering the time they chose to launch their sneak attack. Would we resist and have casualties? Would we be deprived of our possessions without putting up any resistance?

Speaking of choices, being lenient and overlooking them wasn’t an option. It wouldn’t be good to allow them to cause more harm, seek revenge and the like. For example, it wouldn’t be strange for new people, not like us, but honest

Adventurers like Forest Bird, to fall prey to these guys. That was why I was personally insincere towards all of the Adventurers who were did things like dirty their hands and were even harmful to me. These actions in themselves, where one had to obliterate others, were miserable and unpleasant.

“Rossetta-san, I’ll give you a Dimension Stone. Can you call people to come over for us?”

Perhaps it was much too convenient to have the influential woman go to the stele and call for people.

There was a mountain of adventurers that could transfer to the third floor, but there weren’t any issues with leaving if you didn’t have a Dimension Stone, since there were stairs leading out. There might be a chance for the Guild personnel to come here directly.

“...You’ll be fine, right?”

“Yeah.”

Although Rossetta gazed in my direction for a while, she ran towards the stele. Such a thing...seriously. It’s fine not to worry about me.

//

“Yeah, that’s enough.”

After we had returned from the third floor stairwell, we were called to one of the Guild rooms and interviewed by the receptionist woman. If I had to say it, it seemed that she was quite sympathetic towards us. After she had asked several questions to confirm the situation, she released us with a pitying expression. Although I had thought that it would take more time, it was unexpectedly straightforward.

Was it because of Rossetta’s influence, or because she was our representative for the magic examination?

“Those guys are a group that calls itself ‘Snakebite’.”

“There have been a lot of disputes with those guys, since their behaviour has been quite bad.”

“...Is that so.”

For her to be so sympathetic towards us, did that mean this kind of behavior was normal for those guys?

“Since we were able to confirm the facts clearly, I think we should discuss the reward money.”

Reward money, huh? I wasn’t trying to earn any, though.

Grace and Rossetta were seen off by the receptionist lady and returned from the Guild’s room.

Then, Rossetta let out a deep breath and smiled as if her feelings had changed.

“Good work you two.”

“Rossetta-san as well.”

“Yeah. Well then, Theodore-kun, what will you do from here on?”

Was she referring to whether I would enter the labyrinth again?

“...I’ll head back obediently, as expected.”

“There’s that option as well. I’ll head back too.”

“Shall I send you off with a carriage?”

“It doesn’t matter. I feel like walking by myself for a bit.”

Rossetta shook her head when I tried to offer to send her off.

“It’s fine to be in the mood for anything while you do this. I’ll be happy if you make an appearance again. You can consult with me for anything if you ever have troubles, or if there is something you’re worried about.”

“Understood.”

I realized that I was treated well after handling this event.

Rossetta might have regrets regarding Mom as well. She left the Guild with a smile after I gave her a nod.

In the end, she looked over her shoulder at the exit and said,

“Ah, that’s right. Those guys had a black dimension stone on them, for some reason.”

"...Black? What's that?"

...It was an item that didn't exist in BFO.

"Even I don't know what this is. It's the first time the Guild personnel have seen this item, and it seems like they're currently examining it to figure out how it's used. They might let you know the details, depending on what they discover while you're out and about."

Although they were suppressed all at once...It might have been annoying if this item was used. The risk might have been high if it was an item like a Teleportation Trap.

I saw off Rossetta and left the Guild while absorbed in my thoughts.

"...It's slightly tiring."

"Yeah."

I gave Grace, who squinted her eyes and inclined her head, a small laugh and nodded.

There didn't seem to be any side-effects for Grace after being released from her cursed artifact, since those guys were defeated without any blood being spilled. With things as they were before, it seemed it had worried me to the point that I wouldn't be able to calm down for a while.

Aah...That's right.

I needed to turn the raw materials we brought back into money.

Shall we head back after buying a magic stone for the bath? I would probably calm down a bit if I took a hot bath. It was important to regulate one's mood. After I relayed my thoughts to Grace, she looked at me gently.

--

Chapter 16

G5: It's finally bath time but no nudity/nsfw material involved this time, sorry guys. Do keep a reminder that this novel is R15.

--

Chapter 16 – A Quiet Night

“Haah...”

I let out a sigh as I immersed myself into the bathtub. I quickly drew a bath after returning home from the Guild. The temperature was regulated by using a magic stone placed into a wall socket, which raised the temperature, and by adding water from the house’s water system, which lowered the temperature. I made the water slightly hot today.

Although I didn’t know whether I should say that it was the first time for me, or that it had been a while, I felt like soaking in a hot bath because of the tension and fatigue I got from diving into the labyrinth.

What was there to say? A part of me even understood the reason. The inside of my head was spinning, more or less.

Aah, that’s right. I had forgotten to receive the information about the Alchemist. Good grief. I have to keep it together.

I should confirm it the next time I go to the Guild. I’ll try not to forget the various things that need to be done, like arranging the furniture and tidying up the garden.

“Theodore-sama.”

As I looked up at the ceiling, absorbed in my thoughts, a reserved knock resounded from the dressing room.

I took a deep breath and changed the feelings I had to something else. It’s fine. It’s fine. I swallowed those words and proceeded onwards.

“Hm, what’s wrong?”

"I've prepared a set of clothes for you."

We conversed through the door.

"...Thanks. Although I think you understand, you should use the bath as well, Grace."

I had to say, even though she could use the bath with the magic stones that was in the house, it seemed like she had resolved to take a bath outside. If this was the house of a Count...there were various people who would have talked wearily about things like, "It's unthinkable to have a servant use the same bath as their master", or "They shouldn't have a meal at the same table." People like Katherine and her butlers.

Although it might be correct, in terms of being common knowledge, I had shown no signs of living such a formal life before coming here, and there weren't any people around to say such things. Perhaps it was understandable if it was for the sake of appearances. Such things never happened when I was living with mom though.

"Thank you. But, is it fine?"

"...Yeah. We did it before, when we lived together with mother, right?"

"That's true. How nostalgic."

On the other side of the door, a small smile appeared on her face.

"In the past, we also entered the bath together."

"...Did such a thing happen? I don't remember it very well."

"Theodore-sama was young, after all. It's not strange that you don't remember it."

This was a story about a time when I was five, huh.

As for things I remembered, rather than saying that we entered the bath together, Grace had helped me with my bathing. This was just for a little while, since I was taken in by the Count.

At the Count's House, the servants were taught things like helping out with bathing and changing the clothes of the children of their employers, and although that had included Grace as well...I refused her, saying that neither was

necessary.

Needless to say, it was because of my endless bruises and wounds. I didn't want to show Grace such things.

However, when I informed her that it was fine to not help me, since I could do it myself, I clearly remember the sad expression she had on her face.

"Ah. If it's fine with you, shall I wash your back, like in the past?"

That, what was wrong with her? Though, the tone of Grace's voice felt like she had remembered something nostalgic.

...I'm no longer at an age where I should need help with things like bathing, but the original reason I refused her has disappeared. If Grace ended up remembering something sad because of what happened today, I'm willing to say that the current situation was a good thing.

"It sure has been a while...this feels nice."

I answered after I wrapped the cloth I had placed on my head around my waist and sat on the edge of the bath.

"Please excuse me."

After looking over my shoulder towards the door of the bath, Grace rolled up the sleeves of her maid outfit and entered.

She dipped a cloth in some hot water, lathered some liquid soap onto it, and began to carefully wash my back.

Speaking of liquid soap, although it was something that appeared to resemble soap, this was something we bought at the market after returning.

One is able to go to an area called the Twilight Forest somewhere on the 20th Floor, and find a tree, the Sabona Tree, that grows there naturally. The sap of this tree was quite exceptional, and, after attempting to mix and compound it into things like perfume, medicine, and the like, it became something that could be used as soap.

"You have scars on your back."

"They're from a long time ago."

Perhaps the new bruises had disappeared already.
I happened to know of the scars that Grace touched.

She touched the scars with her slender fingertips as if she was tracing them.

“Grace...I’m a bit ticklish.”

“...That...I apologize.”

Although she apologized to me like that, for some reason, she put her arm around my shoulder and lightly hugged me.

“...Grace?”

“I’m sorry. This is the same as it was in the past. I’ve been feeling the reactions from the cursed artifact releasing at times today...I knew about it, so please let me calm down like this. Allow me to stay like this for a bit longer.”

The same as it was in the past, huh.

We had hard times when Grace would come hug me after returning from a hunt, and times when we would sleep together.

Though the memories of that time were really vague to me, I do remember about Grace. I could sleep peacefully at night if I was with Grace, even though it was a bit unsettling.

It took a short while for Dad to let me know about this after mom passed. It was because Dad was absent from Termuilles at the time. He was rather slow in informing me about Mom’s death.

Anyways, I didn’t rely on anyone. Did Grace plan to imitate my mom? We had survived by...hunting demons and animals and the like in the forest with her Released State.

So Grace’s reason for hugging me was from that time, huh?

It was like Grace was feeling anxious about me or was contemplating over me... Though I understood that from her.

“Besides...I’ve been feeling that Theodore-sama has recently been running around by himself. You musn’t be like that, or else someday you will end up going too far. Really...Don’t do the impossible, ok?”

Anxiety...I wonder if that was what connected her reactions to her blood-sucking impulses?

Had I been unreasonable with her?

Though Grace had been saying that, is it because I seemed to have taken some

mental damage from the events today?

"I haven't been unreasonable, you know...Grace came with me to the Labyrinth. I'll let you know if something is unpleasant."

Perhaps it didn't sit well with her to let me head off into the Labyrinth by myself. Well, I understood that.

That's why I wanted her to properly ask me for my true intentions.

"Didn't Risa-sama make her living by fighting Demons? I, too, think that this is fine. That's why I don't want a single complaint about you diving down into the labyrinth. This time, I was able to go it with Theodore-sama. So I will always...be able to understand it, compared to when we were at that house."

"It's fine...if it's that."

Although she had been hugging my back from behind for a while, she finally separated from me as she said that.

"Thank you very much. I feel like I've calmed down."

"Mm. I've also calmed down, you know?"

"...As I thought, were you worried about it?"

"It's not enough for me to be worried about it. It's the same with Grace, right?"

"Yes. I don't think I've mistaken it."

This...is the same with Grace. Whether or not she had been considering it inside her heart until now, neither of us have ever been able to ask about it daringly.

Prior to understanding this, it was probably better to proceed ahead. I didn't want to be deprived, nor did I want to be the one depriving others. It's because I didn't want to stoop to the same level as those people.

After my back was doused in hot water, the soap bubbles flowed down.

"...Shall I wash your hair as well?"

"Yeah...I'll ask you to do it this time."

Today has already...returned to how things were, so shall we spend today

slowly with Grace?

I thought about such things while Grace washed my hair.

After this, Grace would probably enter the bath. After that...let's have a meal together. It's different now from the past when I relied on Grace.

--

Chapter 17

--

Chapter 17 – Towards A New Life

“...ah”

Grace’s sleeping face was next to me when I woke up, and for a moment, I felt my heartbeat quicken.

Although I soon recalled last night’s events, Grace had captivated my attention while I was still half-asleep and given me quite the stir...I think that Grace’s face is too attractive.

Even though I’ve gotten used to looking at it, I haven’t been this close and face-to-face with her for a while.

“Mmm, good morning, Theodore-sama.”

As if I had woken her up by nudging her, Grace opened her eyes a crack and smiled at me.

“...Yeah, morning.”

Though I didn’t really mind it...I was slightly embarrassed.

We had yet to put in a bed, so the two of us had slept by placing a suitable blanket on the floor of the master bedroom and had placed another blanket on top of it.

“Do you want to rest some more, Theodore-sama? I’ll call for you once our meal is ready.”

Grace got up as she said that.

I saw that the day had just broken through the window. It seemed that we woke up a bit too early...I felt refreshed from having slept so well though.

“I’ll help you. I’ll go change my clothes and wash my face first.”

///

The remainder of the foodstuffs we had bought during our journey was vegetable soup and rye bread, which we ate for breakfast. Although it was said that having around this much was standard, we should use up all of our foodstuffs before they go bad. The soup's quality had increased by adding in the Rabbit Meat we had bought at the market.

However, eating just this, even though we had taken great pains to arrive at Boundary City, had become dull. We decided to use a Demon Mushroom from the emergency provisions and foodstuffs we had bought before diving down into the Labyrinth yesterday, the Wisparmush, as our main dish this time.

The Wisparmush was usually picked in the Twilight Forest...rather, it was a Demon that could be subjugated.

The real thing was a walking mushroom the size of a watermelon. Although its hurling attack wasn't anything special, one needed to be a bit careful, since it used Sleep Magic. There was also a need to be careful because it belonged to a poisonous subspecies...though that wasn't much of an issue, since it was relatively easy to tell the difference between them due to its color and umbrella-like shape.

Although they had already been subjugated, sliced, and lined up at the market, just one, with it's watermelon size, was big enough already. It would probably be nice if Grace and I cut one up and ate it.

Grace warmed up the frying pan on the stove and spread some olive oil on it. Just as it was about to get hot enough, she added mushrooms and bacon. A delightful crispy sound resounded from the frying pan.

She then shook some salt and seasoning onto it, and it was finished after cooking for long enough. It was a Wisparmush Sauté.

The main dish was placed on the dining table and it became our breakfast as we sat facing each other.

"How is it?"

The Wisparmush tasted similar to an eryngii mushroom. It had a crunchy texture and it was quite delicious. The seasoning Grace added, which I had gotten used to, was also superb.

(ED: Eryngii – Thick, white mushroom, sweet, buttery taste. TL hates it apparently.)

"Yeah, it's delicious."

"Is that so? Thank you very much."

Along with her straightforward impression, Grace gave me a smile. Fumu. Speaking of the Sabona Tree Sap and the Wisparmush...I wanted to go to the Twilight Forest soon. There were various useful items that even I could use, and it would provide a stable income since a lot of the items were in demand.

"There were various ingredients I wasn't familiar with yesterday, so I was a bit lost."

"These are unique to Boundary City."

There were products like this Wisparmush and the Flying Shark Fillet. Although the items that appeared at the market depended on the trends of the Adventurers, which often changed, there were people who wanted to pardon some of them, like Worm Meat.

"What plans do you have for today?"

"I'll probably go shopping after I receive information at the Guild. I still wonder whether we should go and purchase some furniture...and it's still too early to head out. I think we should go weed the garden for a bit, since it will help us digest the meal."

"Understood."

With this, we decided to do some exercise after the meal. Which meant we would pull out every last weed in the overgrown garden...and we would pull them out using Magic, instead of using something like a sickle. I decided to use Magic without a tool since I would exhaust my Staff's durability if I used it...We would just be weeding at most, so there wasn't any danger to us.

Having said that, there was a Demon, the Evil Weed, that would slip into untouched bushes within the city. A part of the buds, flowers, and the like, turned into a mouth, and the mouth grew until it had teeth. Although, fundamentally, it didn't pose a threat, it was a weed that had a means of self-defence...that is, it bit at you if you laid a hand on it.

Those who were employed as Gardeners were rather hateful towards, them

since they multiplied their seeds in their mouths and shot them anywhere.

Although it was weak precisely because it was a weed...it would still hurt slightly if they bit you. Rather than getting hurt, you would end up getting depressed? This Demon was enough to make...children return home crying, with blood flowing from the tooth marks from being bitten, without knowing they had touched one. Well, in the words of Suzuki, one should be careful enough not to cut their hand and run a thorn through it.

Although their seed shooting, as well as their biting, attacks increased during early autumn, they weren't very dangerous. It wasn't even dangerous if you caught sight of them, and they rarely used their seed shooting attack, as they seemed unwilling to use it. By the way, you couldn't hope to strip materials off the Evil Weed. Although you could probably extract magic stone essence from the seeds during autumn...right now, they would be the size of a sparrow's tear, even if I casted extraction magic. They truly were weeds.

"Then, shall we begin?"

"Yes. Please be careful to not hurt yourself."

"Grace as well. I think there are some Weeds here."

"Yes."

Grace was in a Released State from her Cursed Artifact and was combat ready. Her regenerative power decreased when she was in sunlight, and it would be impossible for her to heal instantly if she was injured, so it was best to avoid any injuries.

Well then, let's go pull out every last one of them! I would be using the Rank 3 Water Spell, Water Cutter magic. I started to cut down and root out the weeds easily after forming a water blade in my palm.

Grace was been swinging her axe at the weeds to her heart's content a slight distance away from me.

I thought it would be fine if we had a sickle...though when in her Released State, the tools she used had to be able to endure it, or else they would end up breaking at the beginning.

Since Grace in her Sealed State was on the same level as an ordinary person, the way she swung her axe in her Released State would end up being more efficient.

I realized that buying something like a Metal Scythe just to cut weeds would be too much, since those were used for combat.

“I’ve discovered one.”

“Gipii!”

Sure enough, it seemed that an Evil Weed had slipped in, and it shrieked as its neck was grasped by Grace and mercilessly removed with her axe.

As Grace, who was beside me, said that, I also discovered some Weeds. I reaped them using Water Cutter, and after that, I cast the Rank 2 Wind Spell, Cyclone to lift all them together and neatly stacked them into a pile in front of me.

Hmm. Maybe it was because I didn’t have Life Magic (TN: magic used in daily life, not healing magic), but it was annoying to individually adjust the power of beginner attack spells in a place like this. Perhaps it was due to me concentrating on my control, but I felt that an excess amount of Mana was depleted. After all, my shoulders were stiff. I wanted to learn Life Magic quickly.

///

“Excuse me, is this the residence of Theodore-san?”

A while after we began weeding the garden, a voice resounded from the entranceway to the garden area.

The person standing at the gate to the house was the guild receptionist lady from yesterday.

Her name was certainly...Heather. Behind her was Forest Bird.

“Yeah, this is it. Um, Heather-san, was it?”

“Yes. I’m sorry for catching you at a busy time.”

“It’s fine, they are just normal weeds.”

After Heather replied, I shifted my gaze towards Forest Bird.

“Good morning, Theo-kun.”

“Morning, Theo-kun.”

“Yeah, morning.”

For now, I decided to open the gate and let them into the garden.

"Although the inside of the house is dull and unsightly, since we have yet to add furniture, shall I bring you guys some tea?"

"No, please don't let us disturb you."

Heather gave us a small smile.

"We ended up having some trouble yesterday, so we had forgotten about the things you had requested. I think you may want to take routine walks on your days off. Here is the letter of introduction and their address."

"Aah, that's very thoughtful of you."

I received the letter with the address written on it. Perhaps Heather had dropped by where Forest Bird were and passed them a message to come with her? I felt that Forest Bird's group was accompanying her because of this. Considering Forest Bird hadn't received any requests, they might have gotten up early. Some of them, like Fitz, were rather sleepyheaded.

"Yesterday was quite the misfortune, you two."

"Seriously, I was surprised to hear that you were being targeted."

"Aaa. Did you guys come here because of that?"

"Well...It could be that. I'm relieved to see that you two aren't injured."

Monica said while scratching her cheek in an embarrassed manner.

"It's enough that the two of you don't have any injuries. You were the one that ambushed and crushed them, right?"

"You've been the talk of the town amongst fellow Adventurers for a while, you know."

These guys were elated as they said such things.

Well...I understood the bubbly feelings Forest Bird had.

They had come here because they were worried about what had happened yesterday. These guys possessed a strong sense of duty.

As for me, I thought it was great that these guys hadn't been targeted.

Chapter 18

--

Chapter 18 – The Aftermath and Shopping

“Come to think of it, exactly what was that black dimension stone those guys had?”

“That’s still under investigation. However, it will be given to us to deal with later on. It was...quite serious?”

Heather said with an apologetic look on her face.

“Well...it was troublesome.”

What Heather meant by ‘serious’ was probably that it was something psychological.

“For this reason, I request that you keep matters related to this stone confidential. Shall I relay this to Forest Bird?

Heather said in a small voice, as if she was whispering into my ear.
Ah...Although she had said that they were on a walk and were being guided, could it be that she was actually here on confidential business?
The way she had been speaking just now, the Guild might already have some information on their relation to the black dimension stone. For example, if the abilities or origins of the black dimension stone were investigated, it might be tied to the background of those guys.

Was it a problem regarding the black stone’s ability, nature, and the like, or was it the background of those guys? This had resulted in me concluding that her reason for coming here was necessary, since her lips were tightly sealed.

“...Though, I don’t think that they know anything. We also learned about it from Rossetta-san.”

“Understood. Although, I’ll be heading to where Rossetta-san is after this...

Well, I'll talk with her, since she's a related party and there's no need to publicize it recklessly."

As I thought, it was confidential? Well, Rossetta might let her know about it, depending on the contents.

The Black Dimension Stone...was probably an item that was manufactured from the Red Dimension Stone and was dependent on magic. It was confirmed in BFO that when one processed a Red Dimension Stone, changes occurred to its abilities and improved its usability. If I were to say what the abilities of the black stone were...I would estimate it to be categorized as an elimination method.

As for whether one returned home from the stele via Dimension Stone or ran away from the labyrinth via a Red Dimension Stone...It could only send you to the stele at the labyrinth entrance.

However, the Black Dimension Stone was able to alter the normally fixed destination. I think this made it possible for criminals to kidnap, imprison, and participate in the slave trade or other such activities.

It made more sense for those kinds of people to use it rather than us, who were targeted for our money.

...Well, rather than calling it interference, it was more of an approach that BFO players used to get the items they really wanted.

This was also the case for magic. Just like Curses, Lineage Magic was the kind of thing that was related to another person's actions, which BFO players could never learn.

For the same reason, it was also impossible for people who used Mind Read for magic interrogations to acquire it.

If fellow players wanted to use magic that could read another's thoughts, emotions, lies and the like, it would be troublesome to use, since they had to be close enough that they could be seen. Although Mind Reading Magic might have been possible if the VRMMO scanned your brainwaves, without that, it was impossible for it to make an appearance again.

Perhaps it was natural for dimension stones that could set a player's destination at will to not appear in the game.

"I'll confirm it one more time, it's fine if I leave it to you, right?"

"Yeah. It appears that, after catching Snakebite, there won't be any similar tricks for a while."

...Well, that's probably true. According to our schedule, it was fine if we did some shopping.

When shopping, self-defense tools, staffs...and furniture are our top priorities. The public order seemed to be questionable, so we should tidy it up all the more.

//

"Welcome."

After entering the store, an unaccountable, pungent odor pierced my nose. ...The origin of the smell was probably inside the store. As expected, inside the store there were medicine bottles displayed beautifully in an orderly manner, and behind the counter, one could see a room that contained various experimental tools and stacks of paper scattered around on top of the desk with a cauldron situated on top.

According to the information from the Adventurer's Guild, there was a skilled Alchemist who had a shop set up in the Northern District, so we headed to this store directly. The first things I should buy are Grace's self-defense tools.

"Is this the shop of the Alchemist Beatrice?"

"Yeah, that's right. I'm Beatrice."

The shop owner was over there, a lazy looking person with dark violet hair and eyes.

She was fiddling around with a quill pen in her fingers, her chin resting on her hand which was on the counter.

Although she looked good, good enough to say that she was a beautiful person...I couldn't feel any ambition from her at all. Was she fine with that?

"What do you want with me?"

I let out a sigh. I wonder if I came to the wrong place? Yet, when I was about to doubt her, I recalled something.

"Umm, here is the Adventurer Guild's letter of introduction. I want to use alchemy to create a Magical Beast for self-defense."

...Speaking of this, it was an item that I had been looking for in Alchemy.

Beatrice asked me about it while she received the letter.

"Even if you say Magical Beast, I have various kinds, you know?"

"The Mercury Shadow, Mercurius."

"Unexpectedly, it seems like I've received a big job. By the way, what's your budget?"

"How about around 1500 Kilig?"

"That's fine."

Beatrice squinted her eyes and showed me a smile. This was according to the market price though. Well then.

"Theodore-sama...you don't have to go this far for me..."

...Grace's words were within my expectations. Perhaps she would consent if she were given a proper reason.

"Even if we searched the Labyrinth, it wouldn't become useless if you created one with a high performance, right?"

"I see."

Mercurius. It usually mimics the form of small animals, and as the name implies, it hides within the shadows. However...its true form was that of an amorphous magic beast with the ability to harden itself into various shapes. In other words, an artificial slime.

"But, I can guarantee that it will have a high performance, you know...? Although the Mercury Shadow is born as a superior familiar, its abilities shouldn't exceed that of its owner's, since it is a familiar."

"I'm fully aware of that."

That's why I chose the Mercury Shadow.

Regarding the prices of magical beasts, the Mercury Shadow was comparatively cheap...and its performance was largely dependent on the quality of the blood used as catalyst.

With 1500 Kilig, it would perform exceptionally, and conversely, it wouldn't be

too inefficient.

However, this time, I had plans to feed it Grace's and my own blood. I wasn't being conceited, I couldn't imagine that its performance would be worse than ours. In view of its price and performance, I had chosen this since I could expect it to be the most cost-effective.

After that, it was fine if we didn't feed it any bait items and the like, since we would be able to maintain it by just supplying it with our Mana. Even if it was used openly, it wasn't noticeable since there wasn't a sense of intimidation coming from it...for various reasons.

It would be completed in three days. There was an advanced payment of 750 Kilig. After it was completed, I would pay the remainder of the price, and she would hand it to me.

As for the blood that we would give to the Mercury Shadow as a catalyst, the two of us would give it later.

After leaving Beatrice's shop, the next thing we should buy was probably furniture?

Staffs would take care of themselves in the earlier levels of the Labyrinth, and although I could hope to obtain them while diving down into it, furniture couldn't be obtained in the labyrinth. First, we should buy the things we needed, and put together a budget for Staffs afterwards.

For these reasons, the two of us were consulting with each other while shopping.

"A canopy bed is for a different type of character though."

"But, I think a style like this is necessary for the master bedroom..."

"Hmm."

"It's proper to have a dresser, right?"

"I don't really need a hand mirror."

"We've also compromised on a dresser for clothes...Let's go ahead and buy this."

"This couch has quite a good feeling to it."

"Seriously, this one is good. How about a table to place in the dining room?"

"What are you going to do for things like that?"

In this manner, we were currently going around choosing furniture in a furniture shop in the Northern District, while indecisively conversing with each other.

It appeared that they could deliver the things we bought for us later. It was wonderful to not have to deal with the hassle of carrying it.

//

The last question, as I thought, was Staffs.

I hadn't found any that I was satisfied with at the shop in the Northern District. Though, the shop owner had said that he could create a good, efficient Staff if I had the best materials for it.

Should I search in the Labyrinth for them, or go look in another District? What should I do?

Speaking about not having Staffs...although it looked like I wouldn't be able use Joujutsu with them, if I used them when attacking with Advanced Magic, the Staffs would be damaged by the recoil. I didn't really want to experiment with that, so I want to be forgiven a little for this.

--

Chapter 19

--

Chapter 19 – Clearing the Labyrinth With Grace

Now then. I've paid the rent and tuition.

I only had 1838 Kilig left after ordering the magic beast and picking out furniture. The large amount of expenses I had expected prior to this had been spent. As for our food expenses, the two of us could preserve our eating habits if we had 2 Kilig. For the time being, if we were to waste our money, it wouldn't be a problem for our daily life, but if something urgent happened, then we would need money.

I plan to pay the 450 Kilig rent again in half a year, and I haven't found anything worthy of attention regarding Staffs, Robes, and the like. If I were to seek out ranked Magic Staffs, thousands of Kilig would quickly disappear. If I were careless, my money might even vanish in the blink of an eye. I should proceed further in the labyrinth when I'm not too busy.

The furniture would arrive tomorrow, so I decided to descend down into the labyrinth with Grace. My goal for today was to continue until the sixth floor while using a map.

“Is there something to take note of?”

“The number of monsters will increase slightly, but it will be fine if we use our method from before. The fourth floor split by stairs that lead downward and doors that lead into other areas. If you see doors you aren't familiar with, please be careful to avoid proceeding through them.”

“Understood.”

Next to the stairs, there was a path that descended into the ground. The door that branched off from there lead to a path that passed through an area, which had turned into a maze of sewers, and ran towards the Old Mine.

As for me, I was aiming for the Twilight Forest. We should dive underground without considering the by-roads. I should descend using the shortest route as usual, since there weren't any points we needed to search for around here.

//

"Fuu!"

Grace's axe literally crushed a goblin, creating a wind-cutting sound. Despite the obstacle of the bow-wielding rearguard Goblins vanishing, I called forth a Cyclone, a wind spell, with my Circulation. Two Goblins, who had gotten jumbled together, were blown away, slamming into the wall and ceiling of the labyrinth, forcing their flesh to tear and bones to break.

Grace looked back at me, and then threw her axe at a Killer Ant that had come in pursuit from the opposite side of the pathway. The ant lost its head and stopped moving after suffering from her axe.

Continuing from earlier, I had adopted a strategy of crushing demon ambushes by sending a Light Ball ahead of us. Although bow-wielding Goblins had appeared, they weren't really a problem. I could blind the Goblins that tried to move around with a Light Ball, since Goblin eyes were only effective in the dark. It was normally dark inside the labyrinth, so they had probably never seen such intense light. Even if I were to be hit by an arrow, it would still easy to defend against and dodge them. That being the case, our exploration had been smooth. Although we collected Dimension Stones and stripped materials off demons in moderation, we were able proceed halfway through the fifth floor without any particular trouble.

"Is your blood-sucking fine?"

"You don't need to worry about me. The blood of Goblins and Kobolds is... smelly."

Grace furrowed her eyebrows slightly. My intuition didn't really know it well, but there were clear differences, considering her view as a dhampir woman. Well, there was also this. Vampires probably had their reasons for attacking humans when they knew there is risk involved. It was more proactive to attack Demons if they could use them as a substitute. If this filled their urge to suck blood, vampires would surely be appreciated, and

would never have become targets of subjugation.

When we caught up to the Light Ball that had traveled ahead of us, it became noisy on the other side of the corner.

We could hear running footsteps approaching from the other side, and to counter this, I swapped with Grace. She became the rearguard and I was the vanguard.

Personally, I was capable of close combat, which relied on Joujutsu and martial arts, and didn't use magic. I wanted to polish these skills more, and Grace could switch out on occasions like these, since she could do long-ranged attacks with her axe-throwing.

As for the demons, they were camping around the corner. I struck the windpipe of the Kobold that came flying at me, and just as it flinched from the attack, I made sure to trap it, and it got knocked down. I used my weight to help pierce the inside of the Kobold's mouth, who then raised a muffled scream from its blocked throat, and then I ended its life. The other Kobold, which had come too late, was taken care of by Grace. I glanced at her and saw Grace throw her axe at it. The axe hit the mass of crimson metal on its chest, and it was blown away into the wall.

As easily as if she was rolling up a yoyo, Grace pulled at the chain in her hands. After considering the sounds which came from the rusted chain, she moved in the direction her axe had flown with an intense force.

Well...it was generally like this. There weren't any problems at all. When Grace encountered the swarm of Killer Ants before, she got a bit carried away while trampling on many weak opponents, which awakened some of her vampiric tendencies. However, it seemed that this hadn't occurred yet, since the encounters were sporadic.

I quickly finished stripping the Kobolds, and then the stairs that led to the sixth floor appeared further ahead, beyond the corner.

We didn't have the maps from earlier, so I could say that the Labyrinth exploration had become a game to me.

"Two new types of monsters will begin to appear from the sixth floor onwards."

"What are they?"

“Wood Puppets and Wisps.”

“I’ve never fought them before.”

“Puppets don’t exist naturally. Meanwhile, Wisps choose the locations where they will appear.”

Although they had a few habits that differed from the Monsters that had appeared until now, both of them were still fundamentally weak.

Wood Puppets were autonomous wooden dolls.

They didn’t feel pain, fear, or the like, and although they were superior to Goblins and Kobolds, they weren’t anything special.

Wisps were pale blue fireballs. They didn’t have real bodies, but they still received damage if they were dispersed. They were also really weak against magic attacks. This opponent was easy for us to handle.

“It’s okay to not change what we’ve been doing until now. Instead, the problem now is how to proceed in the Labyrinth...There still aren’t any traps, and the structure is still tame, so it’s fine to keep at it.”

“Stick on the left side of the wall as you proceed, is it?”

“The right side is fine as well. It’s simple, and it’s hard to get lost.”

Grace nodded after I explained the important matter to her. Although there were also other methods that weren’t in popular use, this explanation would become a guideline for her.

After proceeding through a passage in the Labyrinth, we immediately encountered a Puppet. Although it tried to lightly cross swords with us using its spear, it was a puppet after all. It was completely child’s play.

I rotated the Staff in my hands a bit, and as it drew in with its spear, I swung it up, and was easily able to steal its weapon. Then, it was grabbed by Grace, thrown into the wall, and ended up not being able to take things into its own hands, since its limbs were destroyed.

The areas of the Puppet that would be stripped were the chest or the head, where a glass sphere was situated. Although one could stop it from moving by destroying this, since it was their weakness, you would find that the harvest material would vanish.

Wisps...were pretty easy. With one swing of Grace's axe, a magic stone appeared where the Wisp dispersed. The moment it appeared, its existence had become one that could only be killed since Grace's axe blade was thick. Although the Monsters that had appeared until now were formed in ranks, they would only attack you with magic if they had massed together, and if that wasn't the case, they would vanish at the start. I didn't feel anything in particular.

There wasn't a need to search the small rooms in the area, since we were on a higher floor. After walking around the passageway, we arrived at an area that was wider for a short bit, and discovered a stele.

"What should we do?"

"Shall we return for the time being? It's a policy of mine to make good use of maps."

"Understood."

I loaded the necessary number of Dimension Stones onto the Goddess statue's palm that was engraved on the stele. At that very moment, a magic formation composed of light expanded onto the floor of the labyrinth, surrounding the stele.

Within seconds, a transfer dimension rose. After a moment, we rose into the plaza where the shrine entrance was located.

...Like always, it was clearly visible to others. Whether or not the matter regarding turning the tables on Snakebit had spread, the guys who saw me and gossiped about it were there.

Since Grace hated to be exposed to the public in her Released State, perhaps the place we were heading to, where we would receive less attention, was a better place to operate her ring. Firstly, we returned to the stable where our carriage was parked, and then I led her inside the carriage by the hand before activated her Cursed Artifact.

"Hah, ah..."

Grace, who was sitting on one of the seats, closed her eyes and leaked out a small sigh.

Though, I could only hear it as a sexy sound from her.
Well...it couldn't be helped.

It appeared that in returning to an ordinary human from her powerful Dhampiric state, there was a sense of exhaustion. The difference between the two states was rather big, even if she got used to being in her released state for long periods of time

It was also easy for her to lean towards her vampiric-tendencies, since we were in the darkness of the Labyrinth. Her reactions to her blood-sucking impulses could also appear.

Grace breathed in deeply and slowly, in order to calm down.

Well...having her collect herself and return to her original state inside the carriage was correct.

Let's do it like this in the future. Grace also hated showing others her defenseless side.

"How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. It helps to not feel too hungry."

Grace met my eyes and smiled at me. Somehow, the atmosphere was calm. Yeah. It seemed like there weren't any problems. Next, should we go convert our loot into money at the Guild?

--

Chapter 20

G5: The pain of tling this chapter was over 9000!!!!

--

Chapter 20 – A Noble’s Life Plan

“There was someone looking to request a meeting with Theodore-san earlier.”

“A meeting?”

Just as we arrived at the Adventurer’s Guild to convert our loot into money, Heather called out to us and said that.

...What could it be? I can’t imagine it has to do with having been involved with Snakebite’s group. The Adventurer’s Guild forbade us from talking about it, and she came to tell me that it was better to not be involved with them.

“I was told to have you wait in the Guild for a bit, so please wait in a room inside.”

“...Who in the world is it?”

“It’s Lady Ashley.”

“Eh, Ashley?”

Heather smiled at my confusion.

“I’ll go calculate and prepare the reward money for the case involving Snakebite during your meeting.”

//

When we passed the Guild counter and entered one of the rooms inside, Ashley was there.

“Ashley-sama.”

“Theodore-sama! Grace-san!”

After yelling out our names, Ashley stood up from the couch and smiled at us.

“Ashley-sama, how is your body?”

“Yes, my condition has been well, compared to before. I just arrived in Termuilles a little earlier.”

Ashley exchanged a smile with Grace. The two of us had opened up our hearts to her during our stay at her home.

Ashley didn’t show any repulsion after listening about Grace’s Dhampir state, and it appeared that Grace was also considering Ashley’s position.

“It hasn’t been long enough to say, ‘It’s been awhile.’ Are you tired from your long trip?”

“No. I came here in a Dragon Cage that belongs to the Adventurer’s Guild.”

The Guild’s Dragon Cages...what came into my mind was Beline’s chuckling smile...but assuming things, without listening to Ashley’s reason for coming to Termuilles first, was a bit rash of me.

By the way, Dragon Cages were a form of transportation where tamed, flying dragons, with one or two heads, carried around cages.

Other than those, there were also Dragon Carriages, which were pulled by Land Dragons. They were capable of transporting and moving larger quantities of items much more quickly than horses. Perhaps you could say that the reason I came here using a horse carriage was because it wasn’t worth it to use valuable Dragons on an illegitimate child who had left the house.

Perhaps Ashley had concluded that reducing the burden of travelling by reducing travel time via flying dragons, instead of journeying with horses or land dragons, would be better for her body.

“Well, you surprised me. Why are you here?”

“I’ve also decided to study at Termuilles. I couldn’t contact Theodore-sama on such short notice, but Beline-san was there to take a message for me at the Guild.”

Aah. As I thought, she planned to live here?

“I have something to discuss with Theodore-sama. If you’re fine with it, and if

it's possible for you to do, will you take up a request I've arranged?"

It's normally impossible to arrange requests with beginner Adventurers though...

"This is about continuing the Circulation Refining healing, right?"

"Yes."

"Understood. Let's work out the details later."

...Speaking of the burden on her body, it would become rather large if the Circulation were to change.

To preserve Ashley's physical condition, it needed to be supported by Circulation Refinement.

Without a doubt, her message was...that Kennel had approved of the situation where a noble man and woman, who weren't betrothed to each other, could frequently converse together. The one who drew that picture was probably Beline, though.

However, what to say about it...instead of being deceived by her...I think Kennel was bought by Beline. It was probably a plan to realize the amount of support I was giving to Ashley.

Ashley didn't know anything, and as for Beline's interference going this far, I think she planned to entrust it to our judgement later on. She wouldn't try to injure Ashley's future position, and it was up to me to decide the location for her healing after all.

This discretion wasn't evil of Beline...rather, it was her bad personality.

After speaking about it objectively, I had no right to an inheritance, since I was an illegitimate child. Unless Katherine and her children were like that, I think it was normal for that to belong to Byron's guardians, who were at the Count's house.

Although I didn't want to say that my way of speaking was arrogant, to the degree of suffering a loss from leaving the house, if a blood relative didn't have the right to inherit, then it would be because that person was not a man of talent in regards to the house. The development of a situation where they had to be expelled was, in itself, a failure of the Count's house.

That was why things like my future had originally been decided. Even my

marriage partner might have been someone who would be beneficial to the Count's house, and would have been decided by Dad.

Katherine had harassed me due to her jealousy towards Mom, and the idiot brothers had joined in on that. I was sick of that, so I left the Count's house. In short, my future became a blank slate because of the discord with my family.

Even though I hadn't done anything yet, I disliked talking about my future plans...but if Beline were to speak with me about how I would be viewed, she would evaluate that moving to Termuilles meant that I would probably make a name for myself.

Ten years of age. Around this time, the topic of heirs and superiority would be common at a Noble's house...it was normal...to have multiple concubines as candidates for the main wife, and for one's personal possessions to be solidified. If I were to say it, based on Kagehisa's senses, there was some separation, but in a situation where he acted on his own...I didn't think that Beline and Kennel's thoughts lacked logic. In reality, even Byron was like this.

Beline had been skillful here; she hadn't verbally promised anything, while mediating the connection between Ashley and myself.

No matter what my future and my relationship with Ashley would be like... Kennel's responsibilities of managing the Shirn territory, the relations between the Baron and the Guild, Ashley's noble education and health maintenance, the connection between fellow nobles, and the healing magic that I would provide, would still be there. As for my future, it would be left up to fate...Later on, if I were to add something, it would be Beline's exploits...and not losing money anywhere.

I was an illegitimate child of the Count, but lacked a connection to him. Marital relationships were very pure. As for being a Magician, Beline had thought that Nobles, who were busy being conferred with honors, would surely make appearances. Even if Beline and Kennel weren't like this, surely others would be. The rice would be bought before the harvest, before I could do something about it.

Seriously...well, he was bought by her. Moreover, it was on the premise of me making a judgement, due to having abandoned Beline's plans.

Excellent Adventurers who earned achievements in the Labyrinth were

conferred with honors so that the Kingdom could rope them in as persons of talent, and there were cases where they were given ranks and territory. There were examples of establishing marital relationships with several wives as well. What Beline was assuming was something along those lines. In short, was she planning for me to have a wife along with someone else? When the talk of concubines was proposed, would I be able to refuse without any on principle? In other words...Beline had come to me to inquire, in a roundabout way, about what should be done regarding Ashley.

Although Ashley was a Lord, she belonged to the Baron. She was in a somewhat delicate position. If I was in the market for a marriage partner, it wouldn't be strange for high class nobles to poke their noses into another's affairs, using brute force.

...I see. So that's why it was me? Although I didn't know how Beline viewed my relationship with Grace, she might have a plan after taking that into consideration. Even if it was somehow economical to have multiple wives, I would refuse with the excuse that it was less expensive.

In case I was conferred with honor due to becoming famous in the Labyrinth, surely it wouldn't end with just one wife...but perhaps I would be approached with marriage proposals. If it was someone who wanted to create a connection with me, but didn't have an affinity with nor knew anything about me, my answer would be no.

"Grace-san, won't you teach me the ways of embroidery again?"

"I'll be happy to, if you're fine with me. Only when I have plenty of time, though."

"Of course."

Grace and Ashley seemed to be enjoying themselves with a friendly chat. Although it was an unusually peaceful atmosphere, I didn't have any choice but to overlook their affairs.

My future and marriage partner, huh? I was an illegitimate child, so I had once believed that my life plan would be decided by Dad...and at the same time, while being independent, I didn't consider dealing with such things, as a ten year old. I had even been at the bottom of the hierarchy until now, well whatever.

I didn't need to decide on anything yet, and Dad didn't necessarily need to come and pick me up if I let the storm blow over. This was naturally out of the question, and I would refuse.

If I were to think about it...rather than taking care to not become famous, I could agree from the start that it was buying rice before the harvest.

Nothing had been decided yet, and perhaps Ashley had considered her future with me, but to think about what the two of us would become was still... unsettling. Certainly...at the present moment, she didn't have a bad impression of me. Also, speaking of it being a bit too early to become marriage partners... perhaps it was an unacceptable excuse, as a person who was born in a noble family?

Regarding Ashley...well, I got the gist of it.

If I were to simplify it, it meant that the situation was approaching a conclusion where she should accept a marriage proposal. I didn't have any protectors, so I should firmly decide on my own plans.

Perhaps even Kennel knew of it. He would realize Ashley's plans sooner or later, if she were to receive a noble's education at Termuilles. Even if he didn't realize it, surely this would be implied by him or Beline. That's why, watching Ashley and me interact on this premise would be related.

Presently, the two of us were recognized as friends, so this story hadn't begun.

What of Grace? What about Grace's future?

Although she had said that she would serve me her entire life...If I were to consider lifespans, Grace would live longer.

For example, after I passed away, what would her position in society become? In other words, I was referring to who would seize her Cursed Artifact.

Without abandoning me, who was just recently placed under her care, and besides receiving her, who had followed me to Termuilles, I didn't want to mention it at all, since I didn't know what would happen later.

If I were to consider Grace's future...I think she wanted to establish a position amongst women in society. Although her footing would be solidified by becoming famous at Termuilles, there still wasn't any certainty in that. That's why, in order for that...I wonder what would be good?

If I were to think about it...it was Grace, Ashley, and I. If our thoughts about each other were clear, our interests in the means and goals of living here, marriage to solidify footing, and the like would be in agreement. I would say that it was fine to rush things along, without worrying about them later on.

...Bearing the responsibility of supporting the future of the person I like, huh? To say that I would, or would not do it, was easy. In the first place, I had companions. If I were to run around idly by myself, I would be a complete clown. If I were to consider the discord between Mom and Katherine, there would be things I would be suspicious of and would agree with on an emotional level...and if I fixated on the future, it would be a problem if something happened to us. I had to think about it carefully. I'm sorry for Dad's slipup.

"What will you do, Theodore-sama?"

Grace tilted her head after I looked at her.

"Hmm, well, I'll talk about it after we return. There are various things, like the situation changing and tomorrow's plans and the like, to consider."

It was more than just understanding it. I, too, would prepare myself. Even if I left out Ashley's story.

It wasn't just for work-related reasons, since she was a servant meant to serve me, and it wasn't me fawning over myself, since I thought of her as an older sister.

When the time came to separate from that place, it was important to be clear about whether or not it was fine to completely take charge of her life. I shouldn't be deceptive if I am considering the importance of Grace's life. I'll confirm her answer, since it's important for people to decide on their own life plans.

--

Chapter 21

G5: I hope you like some feels 'cause they're everywhere here.

--

Chapter 21 – Distant Memories

“...And there’s that. Beline was thinking in such a way, huh.”

“Is that so? Everyone can contemplate various things, you know.”

We settled down after returning to the house, and after I had explained the situation to Grace, she nodded in admiration.

Well, it was a sufficient explanation because the one who had actually considered various things was Beline.

The story Beline had was reasonable, and it was something I needed to consider.

Regarding multiple marriage partners, the one who needed to see to that was me. If this continued any further, I would exhaust all of my energy. I would withdraw if that weren’t the case.

It was just that I thought I needed to relay these things to Grace, no matter how things turned out.

“That’s why, due to the current situation, I have some things I must ask of Grace.”

“Y-Yes.”

After staring at Grace with a serious expression, she sat up straight as well. Right now, the reason Grace was next to me was because...she was indebted to Mom for saving her.

This shouldn’t be misunderstood.

I was just recently placed under Grace’s care, and I didn’t have anything to return to.

That's why, regarding what would happen after leaving the house, I left it to her to decide.

If I were to make a place that I could belong to in Termuilles, then it would probably become her place as well.

However, in order to solidify Grace's footing, that alone wouldn't be enough. She was a mixed blood vampire, and consequently, her position was quite unstable.

Then, what should I do about it?

The answer was simple. After I solidified our positions, all she would need to do was nod.

It was scary imagining that she would refuse...after listening to this. But still.

If she wanted to entrust her Cursed Artifact to someone after I had passed away, then it should only be to someone she chose...If that was the case, then maybe it would be to her family or children?

If she nodded in agreement, that is. There was enough room for her to stay next to me.

"Although Grace said she would serve me, I dislike feeling dependent, even if it's because of an obligation to Mom. It's fine if you're here because of a debt of gratitude or for work, but for Grace's personal life, it's definitely for the best that those are separated."

I paused in between words for a moment, took in a deep breath, and closed my eyes.

I opened my eyes and, while looking at her, I spoke directly to her.

"I'm saying that it's fine for Grace to walk with me as a companion. I think, I always want you to be beside me."

"...T-That's."

Grace looked at me with surprise. Let's talk about it properly so that there aren't any misunderstandings.

"I want you to marry me. That's further down the line, though."

Since this was further down the line, I needed to further solidify my own standing, or perhaps this conversation would become useless for Grace's future.

"...I understand what you mean."

Grace closed her eyes as she replied.

I would wait for her reply with a hopeful heart.

No matter what someone, no, anyone, thought about it, it was fine. To be refused by Grace would be...

"Before I...give my reply, I have something that I want to tell Theodore-sama, no matter what."

Nervously, she took in a big, deep breath.

"I'm not here as an obligation to Risa-sama."

Grace spoke.

Mom, Grace, and I. The events of the day we first met.

"I...my parents passed away, and I had been wandering about aimlessly, without anywhere to go. There was no one that would approach a mixed-blood child. If I interacted with people too much, I would have been chased with stones and stakes. Nobody ever extended their hand to me. I think that this couldn't be helped. My hands are capable of easily killing people."

This is about the time she didn't have a Cursed Artifact, huh?

"I've always been hungry, but I hate seeing people as food. That's why I was scared of just about everything, and I ended up hiding away in a forest until I was picked up by Risa-sama. I had vampiric impulses, but I'm half-human, after all. I could just live on regular food. It was really...painful."

"...Yeah."

That's what she taught me.

Even if she sated her appetite, it was only 'Half'.

That didn't seem to be the case anymore, since that trait was suppressed by the Cursed Artifact.

"I think that Theodore-sama doesn't remember the day I first met Risa-sama. I realized it from the start, but Theodore-sama is a greater priority to me than Risa-sama. The small Theodore-sama, who was held by Risa-sama, gave me, who was in a bush, a smile when you met my eyes. That made me very happy...and

sad. After realizing that, my heart was filled, and I ended up crying.”

“That’s...”

She couldn’t be accepted by people since she was a Dhampir. This I understood.

I, who was a baby not much older than one, saw her face and laughed.

Something like that...was by chance, wasn’t it?

Grace, after understanding the things I wanted to say, smiled at me, and shook her head slightly.

“After that happened, Risa-sama noticed me as well...and gave me this ring. She gave me a place to belong to. That’s why, with these hands, I won’t end up hurting children, even if I caress them. Theodore-sama, no matter what you see me as, not once were you scared. You’ve never hated me. Do you understand how many times you saved me because of that?”

Grace placed a hand on her chest, and said that.

“I, too...will say that I want Theodore-sama to be beside me. From the past until now, I’ve always, always been shameful. I said that I would get hungry because of my blood-sucking impulses, but now, even if I have them, I don’t feel hungry. What do you think the difference is? Do you understand what the origins of these impulses are?”

The origins, huh?

...Ah. So it was like that? One of the reasons vampires suck blood is for food.

They hunt prey since they’re hungry. It’s simple.

However, there is still more to it. In other words, it’s to increase the amount of companions they have.

If Grace was at my side, then her impulses would calm down. Wasn’t it really obvious if one considered what her impulses would turn into as a reaction?

...Well, could she disclose it to me as a secret after all, huh? Even if I mulled over it, I would be too conscious of being prideful, and perhaps I would dismiss it with a smile.

“Restless feelings are fake, you know. I’ve come to know about what they are, little by little, since I always thought about it, ever since Theodore-sama said it was fine to help him with changing clothes, bathing, and the like.”

...It wasn't when Grace was small. Perhaps there was a change in emotions and an increase of awareness towards me, who accompanied her while growing up. What would be the correct way to express my feelings? I wouldn't be able to see her reactions if she hugged me. This reason and the correct words that should be expressed. Perhaps she had gradually understood them.

"Whether or not it was fine, I had pampered Theodore-sama with kindness...to remove Theodore-sama's anxiety, like I did in the past. Once there was proper communication, I was scared that...Theodore-sama would stay away from me."

Grace closed her eyes bitterly.

It was out of the question to harm the owner though, since I had the Cursed Artifact.

In reality, these feelings wouldn't die after all, huh?

"That's why, now that you've heard this, I'll ask you, are you fine with such a shameful me?"

Although I had listened to the nervous Grace, my decision had already been made.

"It's like I said before, I don't consider that a problem at all."

"Theodore-...sama."

"If your blood-sucking impulses originate from such feelings, isn't it obvious that I would be happy if they were directed at me?"

I knew my face was getting hotter while I said that. This doesn't match my character, geez.

It was impossible to stop things that were related to the one you love. Speaking of the fear of being rejected after conveying my feelings to her, perhaps the fear I had felt before I was cut off from Grace earlier was unchanged. Perhaps the one who felt more strongly about this was Grace.

"Is it okay? Something like that, I'll definitely cause trouble for you."

She asked me that with a dumbfounded look.

"You know Grace, it will probably be me that will cause you trouble, and worry you."

"S-something like that is...A-ah. Are you referring to Beline-sama, from earlier?"

"Hmm...well, there's that as well."

Grace smiled at me and shook her head.

"Speaking of that, surely...it will be a bit troublesome, but if it's Ashley-sama, then I can agree to it, and I'll also be a bit happy. I think I also want to support the things related to her."

"...Is that so?"

"Yes. Ashley-sama, towards Theodore-sama, probably..."

Grace stopped speaking and shook her head slightly.

"...I'll stop there. Surely the one who wants to tell Theodore-sama this is Ashley, I don't think this is something I should say."

...What was it? I was a bit concerned now. Even if I looked at Grace, she just squinted her eyes mischievously.

The two of them had talked about many things in Schirn's mansion...they might have had a conversation that I didn't know about.

Was that why their relationship was so strangely good?

"Theodore-sama?"

"Yeah?"

"Is it okay to call you by your name, like I did in the past? At least, just for now."

"...Fine."

Something like that, if Grace wished for it, then it didn't matter what she did. After smiling at her, Grace smiled back as well, and said that.

"Thanks, Theo."

--

Chapter 22

--

Chapter 22 – At Perezford School

Theodore-sama, over here.”

Grace, who was sitting on a couch, patted her thigh lightly while smiling happily at me.

“Ah...sure.”

I laid down slowly. Grace was giving me a lap pillow.
Grace cheerfully began to clean my ears with an earpick she took out. As for me, I became absent-minded.

“Please tell me if it hurts, okay?”

“Yeah. It feels perfect.”

It appeared that Grace had been quite starved for some skinship ever since we returned from descending into the Labyrinth. In other words, after her Released State went away, events like these occurred a bit, so her reactions to that vanished.

...We still weren't in a •• relationship.

Age was age after all. However, Grace appeared to not know of these things, since she wasn't omniscient.

...It was hopeless, and useless, to play the gentleman with no intentions of premarital sex, since that wasn't the case. First of all, I couldn't help but feel that we wouldn't be able to stop if we were to cross the line.

After considering the future, it would only become a scandal if that happened right now.

A ten-year-old shouldn't read too much into these things...Erm. The memories and common sense of a past life were both good and bad...

For now, the changes in my body were fine...but if I were to grow up a bit more,

it would be uncertain...Let's do our best to solidify my foundation until then.

"Now that I think about it, isn't tomorrow the day Theodore-sama goes to school?"

Grace said that, as if recalling the information she had received from Perezford School.

"Yeah, the course on Life Magic?"

"Yes."

Or more precisely, lectures and short courses.

Although Life Magic courses were conducted year-round, the general curriculum rotated, so you had to wait for a cycle to end in order to attend a lecture from the beginning.

When the next day arrived, I went to the School.

I was currently in a room that reminded me of a college lecture hall.

Looking down towards the teacher's desk, it was the same layout...of having the students' seats arranged in a radial pattern along the stairs. Perhaps I should say it was compact, since it wasn't a wide room.

Nobles weren't allowed inside lectures for attendants and servants. It would be fine to bring Grace along to School if she wanted to learn something, but she would be refused if she asked.

I had yet to find something I wanted to learn that was worth paying the high tuition fee, even though Life Magic was convenient; the one who said it would be a waste if she couldn't check her compatibility with it, after my teaching her, was Grace.

Well, certainly...the disposition of a Dhampir's Mana was different from that of regular humans, and even if their Mana supply was high, the issue was more along the lines of whether they could memorise that magic. Not being able to use Life Magic, even after paying for tuition, would be problematic. I thought that moving about discretely like this wasn't wrong, though it was troublesome...

With that said, right now, Grace was passing the time by embroidering in a waiting room next to this lecture room.

I should say that the facilities around here were meant for the education of

Nobles.

Although Perezford didn't acknowledge lectures for servants, attendants, and escorts, it was capable of handling the selfishness of nobles, at least. Well... presently, the Mercury Shadow was concealed in Grace's shadow as a bodyguard, so it was perfect. It was within a range where it could rush forth immediately.

Looking around, I looked at all of the students present. Although generally, you should understand that with this atmosphere, one's personal appearance, behaviour, and way of speaking was that of a noble...the ratio of attendees was three nobles to five civilians, and it was said, that...out of both, two were unknown. In short, the percentage of Nobles in this head count was high.

Although the townsfolk tended to think that Life Magic was used because of its convenience, in reality, even low to high ranking nobles had a demand for it. This, as a result, was tied to the subjects of the attendees' lectures. It didn't mean that there were scientific ideas and proof in regards to heredity though...Magicians with backing tried to curry favor with influential people like Nobles and wealthy Merchants by forming relations, and amongst nobles, there were quite a bit of people that had talent as Magicians. That was why it was natural for there to be a lot of Noble's children who wanted to try and learn Magic. Among them, their reasons for trying to learn Life Magic...well, there were a few.

For example, the motives of people who couldn't afford the tuition, like those with the ranks of Knight, Baronet, and the like, were pretty straightforward. Those guys would scrape up the school fees, no matter what, in order to gain the means and titles for a successful life...but there were also a lot of cases where their houses didn't have enough people to help out. There were also people who tried to improve their skills in Life Magic to make their daily lives more convenient.

The children of wealthy Nobles were a separate matter. Perhaps there were people who considered leaving their houses in order to not be an heir, and in regards to learning Mana Control and Element Conversion, learning Life Magic was regarded as more important.

My case was just...that it was convenient to learn Life Magic. You could lighten

the weight of baggage even as you descended the Labyrinth. I always remembered to prioritise Attack Magic and Magic, which could be used in labyrinth searches, and conversely, one needed to be mindful of the order of learning things.

“Regarding important magic lectures, if you were to attend one, then it would be Life Magic!? Why must someone like me learn such trivial Magic at this hour! Such a thing should be learned by commoners!”

“Everyone knows well of T-Talcott-sama’s talent! However, this is Maurice-sama’s wish!”

“Aah, so noisy! Don’t make me bring my father into this!”

One of the corners of the classroom became noisy...Well. It seems there were some Noble’s children who didn’t understand the importance of Life Magic. . Servants and attendants desperately soothed the angry noble child with a flushed face. He was a noble around 14-15 years old.

Maurice and Talcott. Huh? Didn’t they belong to the house of Count Cardiff...I wonder?

Although Maurice had territory in a district as a central government official...it seemed that he left its management to a retainer. I had heard rumors that his son, Talcott, was a ruffian who had quite the talent in the field of Magic, and that his dad gave him free reign. I had heard various other things as well, but... well, that wasn’t something to worry over.

Anyone from Noble society was capable of gossiping after all. Even if it was in the central region or its surrounding regions, many rumours spread, even to the ears of illegitimate children. Scandals in particular.

For now, I had caught wind of nothing good about the parents and children of the Cardiff House. I was under the impression that other people also looked at their scandalous behaviour with cold eyes.

Hah...I recalled the behavior of those two idiotic animals from my house. Since it was a Count’s house that was similar to mine, I thought it was...quite unpleasant.

Other guys sneered at me, but rather than being unable to laugh at what they thought about me, they were unable to witness any spectacles at all. For now, it

seemed that the story had been settled in a way that increased the lectures of other types of Magic.

The disturbance calmed down some time after Ashley entered the classroom . The timing was quite right. I, too, wanted it to end before it became an unsightly scene.

“Ah, Theodore-sama, good morning.”

“Good morning, Ashley-sama.”

Ashley found me when she scanned the classroom, beamed with joy, approached, and then sat next to me.

“Today is Theodore-sama’s first lecture, right?”

“I only have plans to take lectures on Life Magic after all.”

Though, it was still fine to take lessons on hand-to-hand combat with Rossetta as a good example for those who wanted to try it. Unfortunately, she specialized in lectures on Healing Magic, and I felt that Ashley would be under her care no matter what she did.

“Now that I think about it, how did you acquire Healing Magic?”

“From the memo that Theodore-sama gave me. I’ve already perfected the beginner level.”

“That’s perfect then.”

“Well, it’s because I’m indebted to Theodore-sama.”

That was what Ashley said, but to be able to use beginner Healing Magic immediately with just that memo and a simple lecture, as I thought, she was talented.

Although she had understood how to acquire Healing Magic...Ashley was an unexpectedly brilliant user of Healing Magic.

“I’ve been thinking that, after I improve my memorization of Life Magic, I should be able to cast it without any chants.”

“Yeah, you might be able to.”

It would be good if she could become a suitable disciple for Rossetta, and even

learn Support Magic...It didn't have to be hand-to-hand combat.

"Ah, sensei has arrived."

Looking towards the front as Ashley said this, an old professor entered the classroom. Well then, Life Magic, huh? I wonder what kind of class it will be.

--

Chapter 23

--

Chapter 23 – Magic Lecture

“Mana is a power born from all of nature, and it is said...that we can control and interfere with this nature with a form dependent on our will. The magic we use is said to be a technique that makes use of that nature, so in other words, it appears that there is an official law that clearly defines the movement of the Mana we vaguely control.”

The Life Magic professor, who had introduced himself as Travis, spoke clearly as he walked slowly, from right to left, on the platform.

We would receive knowledge on the foundation of Mana, so it was a class suited for those taking Life Magic.

“However, what becomes an issue is, accordingly, the disposition of Mana. The quality of Mana differs with each individual’s physiques. The color of our hair and eyes, and the form of our face...and each one of your habits are different. For this reason, even if we used the same technique, according to one’s Mana Alteration method, their lineage, and the like, the results will be different. In other words, it means that each of you has an aptitude for certain things.”

Concerning the disposition of Mana, it was said that affinities were specialized and differed depending on the person, and types of magic included an element. If I were to state it simply, then perhaps it would be called a Specialized Element?

If I were to provide an example of the quality of Ashley’s or Rossetta’s Mana... then it would be easy for it to adapt to another’s body, since the disposition of Mana was really straightforward, and Lineage Magic would be effective at affecting one’s physical body. In other words, you would become skilled at elemental Healing Magic.

As for me, I could generally call out Attack Spells, since I excelled in generating

power. Regarding what I originally specialized in, I had gotten used to dealing with various types of magic from the start, so in reality, I wasn't very familiar with my specialty.

I felt like I made progress when I used them often in BFO. As for Attack Magic, I enjoyed using various types, since I was in a position where any of them were fine.

In Grace's case, rather than the disposition of Mana, she had the characteristics of her race. If I had to say it, then it would be Mana Corrosion, and Mana Sucking. I felt that they were suited for Alteration and Absorption respectively.

"The amount of Mana needed to cast Life Magic is small, and it's already easy to deal with the setup of the technique. As you get used to dealing with magic, you will understand the natural tendencies of Mana, and it's good to study the ways to deal with Mana that you aren't accustomed to using. Of course, as for the original use of Life Magic, we recommend that you make use of the things we will show you every day, in a positive manner."

Usually, the concept behind the Magician Guild Towers was that Magic was the main power for Magicians.

Just as Travis finished his introductions, he urged the students to give their self-assessments by raising their hand and then split the students into two groups. In other words, he could more or less see the Mana that was flowing out from their bodies.

I thought there was a possibility of using Mana Control if one could see Mana. Rather than that though, I thought it was the feeling of studying the sensations felt as Mana moves with the applied technique.

In short, if one were to try to reproduce the chants and movements for Life Magic simplistically and correctly, then that technique would freely reproduce the movement of Mana.

Chantless Magic was said to reproduce chants without any movements while remembering the movement of Mana.

Magic Circles were substitutes which activated the technique by linking the Mana inside one's body with a circle that voided all of the cast and Mana movement.

"With that, I will now teach you a simple Life Magic chant. Each one of you has the potential for Mana Recognition, and it's good to try to make use of Life Magic while being attentive to the movements of Mana inside your own body. For those that can't use Mana Recognition yet, during this time, I'll guide each one of you."

What Travis taught us were three kinds of Magic; a spell that produced an ember, a spell that gathered water, and a spell that generated a gentle breeze. In order to at least handle spells like Ember, everyone did practical training in the courtyard outside of the classroom.

Travis was guiding the group of people who were not yet able to use Mana Recognition, one by one. With that, the group that had managed to use Recognition was doing self-practice nearby.

I, too, should remember it properly without being lazy. I couldn't use Chantless Magic, which required the proper processes, and I couldn't fix Magic Circles either.

"Ah, please look! I did it!"

A pea-sized flame burned, floating slightly apart from her fingertip. Even if Ashley moved, she kept the flame in a very stable manner, so there was no need to worry about it vanishing.

It appeared that Ashley hadn't realized it, but the level of her performance was already slightly more advanced than just activation.

"I'll also give it a try."

Let's try to ignite a flame on my fingertip using a chant.
Hmm...I decided to leave it up to the technique, so that I wouldn't have to think about controlling it. It was really fun. When I lit the firewood with a flame in the house, adjusting it was quite troublesome. If I were to consider the future, then perhaps its usability was good.

"Theodore-sama hasn't learned any Life Magic until now?"

"Yeah. I remember that my reason called for Attack Magic."

"...Is that so?"

Ashley furrowed her brows slightly.

"...Well, it wasn't such a serious reason. I had the chance to learn it, so I only memorized it."

...It was a fact that I had learned Attack Magic, starting from the basics, from the magic books in my dad's study because I wanted strength. Somehow, it had become like that, but it didn't mean the studies I had would put me at my wits' ends or make me vomit up blood, since nearly all of the Magic I had acquired was from BFO's system.

The others had their successes in activating the Magic as well, but even if Life Magic was for noobs, as I had thought, there weren't many who could maintain the spells.

Among us, only five people could do it, huh? I didn't know whether this number was a lot or a little.

For now, memorizing Life Magic was simple. If one was capable of that, then they should study at a proper place, like the School. It was simple magic, therefore, adjustments were made at will to make it easier for each practitioner, and people would switch to uncommon habits as well.

"Hey, you."

Talcott said that in a rough tone.

...It wasn't to me, but to Ashley.

"What is it?"

I said that, and stood in front of Talcott under the pretense of misunderstanding him.

"Not you, her. You, I've heard that you're the Lord of Schirn."

Impossible. What the hell is this? He should behave better if he knew that she was a Lord. Although he was born into a Count's house, Talcott himself was just a normal child, while Ashley was a Baroness.

Although Ashley had apologized to me before...it appeared that he was an unusual case.

"You are—"

“Theodore-sama.”

In the meantime, I had considered trying to warn him about mannerisms in a big voice and then withdrawing. However, Ashley looked at me and stepped forward. Was she saying that she would personally respond since she called out my name?

I thought Kennel’s education, and Ashley’s behavior, were correct though. Besides, it was an issue regarding his common sense.

In case something happened, then I would respond with something to beat the crap out of him, like an Air Bullet.

I firmly held a Magic Circle inside of my hand, and stood on standby, ready to activate it.

“Certainly, I’m Ashley Lodian Schirn. Do you have some business with me?”

“Previously, a while back, I’m sure my old man sent you a marriage proposal. What happened to that?”

...Ah. This idiot...is he going to talk about it right here?

There was a rumor that one year ago, Talcott made a mistake in his Magic control, which resulted in injuring his fiancé, who belonged to a wealthy merchant family, and their engagement was broken off. Even the concubine candidates who stayed by his side ignored him completely as well.

Marriage was imminent after all. The impatient father was guilty of adding onto his shame by sending marriage proposal letters repeatedly to single noble women.

He probably wouldn’t succeed given enough tries. Who would nod in agreement immediately after such a scandal?

Not worrying about reputation was painful for one’s financial situation that was dropping in tax revenue. Although there was probably an intent to gain financial support through a marriage agreement with the wealthy merchant’s daughter, that ended up getting broken off.

Ashley also showed a bewildered expression. That’s right; he hadn’t even introduced himself yet.

“Please wait. Which house do you come from?”

“I’m Talcott of Count Cardiff. You don’t know me?”

Ashley probably didn't know. It was unlikely Kennel informed her about such things.

"Was that right? Although I've heard of Count Cardiff, it's the first time I've heard of something like marriage proposals. There might be a misunderstanding. I think that I would want to reply to the Count's House again after confirming it with the fellow house members in my territory."

Sure enough, it seemed Kennel had turned them down. Although the reply was probably from Kennel, there was no doubt that Talcott hadn't heard of the reply for each one. He was a guy who, if informed of his annulment, would lose his temper, and was capable of firing off Magic.

Well, Ashley's reply was perfect. She even adjusted her manners, and her vague answer avoided giving him any word of promise. Although Kennel was partially biased due to his overprotection, more or less, he himself had raised her.

This situation would likely become prolonged by sending a formal rejection with a valid reason to the house of Count Cardiff once more. As to whether Talcott understood this from Ashley's expression and her unfavorable reaction...it seemed he did, as he glared in my direction after clicking his tongue.

"I've heard that the Lord of Schirn doesn't have a fiancé. Who are you?"

"I'm Theodore Gartner, Ashley-sama's friend."

Perhaps my response gave him an unpleasant impression of me?
Well, it was fine if he understood the situation better.

"Gartner...Aah, a provincial Count? Are you from the Upper or Lower region?"

"Neither of them."

Well then, what should we do?

Was it fine to ask about matters related to his fiancée under the pretext of not knowing anything?

I was a provincial noble, so I didn't know of any scandals in the central region. I decided that I would simply stand by with the excuse of 'I'll only intervene if he gets upset', and would withdraw if he controlled himself.

"Did something happen?"

Travis returned after guiding the other students before I put my plan into action. Talcott clicked his tongue before leaving us. Ashley took a deep breath as if relieved.

"Quite the mishap, eh Ashley?"

"No. I'm fine thanks to Theodore-sama."

Ashley met my gaze with a wry smile.

//

This time, the group contained several people who were divided further into an Advanced Group and a Newcomer group to watch Magic in pairs. These groups were then guided by Travis as he went around and observed. Somehow, my group contained only younger children. Well...perhaps those who were close to my age had good manners, like Ashley. The guidance was arranged in such a way that Ashley was with the girls, and I was with the boys.

"Ashley-sama, how do you continue to produce a flame for that long?"

"Hmm...About that, I slowly produce a small amount of Mana from my fingertip and—"

"You're good, Theo!"

"The technique will allow you to move the Mana if you do a proper chant. It's better to remember to maintain it carefully."

Well, it was currently progressing in this manner. Although Travis donned a slightly serious attitude when he was explaining the topic, the atmosphere of the lecture was quite lax.

"How can you do it this so well!"

It continued fairly smoothly, but there were guys who complained about the Magic of someone in their group.

Travis looked in our direction for a moment, but decided to ignore us in the end and went to provide guidance to another group. The reason Talcott had attended this lecture...was likely due to his inadequate

control over his Magic.

The head of Cardiff was said to be a cruel and indifferent person, but it appeared that even he could not turn a blind eye to Talcott's lack of control over Magic, as it had dealt a blow to the house's reputation at an important time.

Maybe they had properly conveyed their intentions to Travis, who was the professor.

If that was the case, then perhaps Talcott would be reprimanded properly when his turn arrived...in front of everyone.

"Why must I fiddle around with such foolish Magic when I can handle Intermediate Magic? Can I skip this lecture if I were to show it?"

Talcott continued to spout nonsense.

This statement of his rode upon the winds and reached my ears, which caused me to lift my head in surprise. However, before I knew it, Talcott's complaints stopped.

This...was a chant for Fire Storm!? What the hell was this idiot thinking!?

-- --

Chapter 24

--

Chapter 24 – A Bet And A Match

“Firestorm!”

After Talcott yelled that out, a flame vortex rose from the center of the group. Screams broke out from the surroundings.

It was quite difficult to handle the position of Firestorm Magic. It was considered unsuitable for battle.

However, the vortex didn’t stray from the center.

No doubt about it. It appeared that he was capable of controlling it. I had planned to cast an area of effect water magic to counter his magic, as I was aware that there would be injuries if the affected area increased...but it still looked fine.

“How’s that everyone, take a look! I don’t need Life Magic!”

Talcott was laughing proudly. He waved the flame vortex, which moved with his laughter. That was quite dangerous. He needed to concentrate, since he couldn’t afford to lose control.

I had no confidence in knowing how his flame would move after I robbed him of his sense. With that said, I didn’t know how long he could continue to maintain control over the vortex if I left it as it was.

It didn’t necessarily mean that the Firestorm would come this way when he lost control. I first needed to dissipate the flame so that an accident wouldn’t occur. Pushing aside the students who were on this side, I began to place both of my hands on the ground in order to cast a spell that had been on stand-by.

“Flame Absorb.”

A sphere of darkness shot out from my hand and began to absorb the flame. However, the people who were in the direct line of fire between the flame and

the sphere ended up engulfed in fire before it was absorbed. Although the ignited fire could be absorbed, you would be burned if you were touched by it before it was completely absorbed.

It was necessary to use magic and direct it at the approaching flame pillar. Only some hot air was left. Just about all of it vanished beautifully.

"W-What?"

Talcott's eyes were wide open as he looked at me. So he didn't react by attacking me in a frenzy, huh?

"You, what was that Magic you used just now!?"

It appeared that Talcott didn't know Flame Absorb.

Travis was...oh, it was no good. He had withdrawn.

Tower Magicians were experts in Life Magic. No matter how you thought about it, these people didn't belong on the battlefield. Although this class took shape through Travis describing the importance of Life Magic, which bound Talcott, it couldn't be helped if it was unreasonable. I was already involved since he butted in. Well then, what should I do?

"It's Magic that counters flames. Why are you such an idiot?"

I clasped my hands and released a magic circle in my left hand, a Magic Shield, and in my right hand, an Air Bullet, and began to talk with them on stand-by. Well, there was no use in arguing about it, so I thought the best solution was to knock him out. I couldn't help but think that Talcott himself was not violent by nature.

More precisely, if he was this unreasonable, it would negatively impact his own interests. My imagination had gone too far out of bounds from my routine thoughts.

As to whether Kennel should have done the things related to Ashley...I had never heard any rumors that stood out too much, but what did stand out was their bad reputation.

I had heard various things regarding him and the Cardiff House.

Like servants using Magic and injuring several of his citizens.

Like his dad fleeing from his people for making a mistake in his farming methods, causing his tax revenue to decrease.

It was certain that there were known scandals. If I were to say it from another viewpoint, then I didn't know anything about him aside from the gossip. I had thought about it too abstractly...I had thought about deciding that they were just rumors if the information had been corrupted. Though, there certainly was some disgust, as if I was seeing my step-mother and brothers. Although the fiancé's injuries weren't that severe...could he, for example, have been driven by a sense of guilt that would have ended up hurting the fiancé—?

"Huh? You're the idiot. Did you not understand me? Why the hell are you getting in my way like this? How will you 'let me see a painful experience' with that response?"

I thought as much.

I felt that Talcott took great pleasure from being able to prove his power and had never blamed himself to the point of despair from being driven into a corner or from having possibly injured people. As a result, my curiosity was piqued. Although he had been sticking to his own opinions like this...perhaps he didn't realise what would happen if he were to behave like this outside?

If that was the case, perhaps the pretense of his dissatisfaction from earlier was actually in protest against the dissatisfaction of showing that his own true abilities were weak, or that he needed to improve his control. Although he might have been unwilling to cause injuries by accident...it wasn't that they were caused frequently, but that he was largely unwilling to admit the fact that they were unintentional. He wanted to put up a fancy performance. In short, he was a violent person who had a talent for magic. Surely he was a watchdog from his territory...no that wasn't it. Oh, I've remembered. He was the second son who was called, 'Cardiff's Fierce Dog.'

"I don't know the extent of your Control."

"...What did you say?"

Talcott grew angry. Aah, without a doubt, with a sentence like this, I was basically saying that I doubted his Control. Before he acted rashly, I decided to guide him in a better direction for a bit. Compared to me, he was more of a small child. It would be troublesome if he turned violent.

"In short, you're a great person who excels at handling Magic. You've thought about such things, right?"

"Isn't that natural? Although my old man had been looking at me favorably, that is the way things are now. I've always done it like this, you know?"

Not a watchdog, but a Fierce Dog.

In order to incite his usefulness. In other words, it meant that his dad demanded he play a role in a violent organization, since it was convenient to suppress his population with force. Well, I generally agreed with that.

Well, it would become like this if he only needed to know about his house and territory. If only one person could do Magic, then that person would be spoiled. Anyways, that guy was...It couldn't be helped that he was protected by Count Moris.

Although I had talked about various boring things, perhaps I had had too many illusions about Nobles up until this day.

Something like "Noblesse Oblige" was my ideal. Should I, who moved around for my own benefit, not speak of Nobles?

Termuilles was a militaristic land. When push came to shove, the tendencies and values of the guys who were skilled were said to be correct...well that was certain. Although Count Moris was surely a Magician of the Military when he was young...Talcott probably wasn't one.

However, it was too soon to talk about these things. His thoughts belonged to a category that was easy to understand.

It appeared that he thought I was worth listening to after I used Flame Absorb. In any case, I got involved with him, who needed to be persuaded. If we were following a hierarchy based on power, then I needed to take care not to leave any seeds for future trouble by making it clear who held the authority in the relationship.

"...Understood. Will you have a match with me?"

"A match, you say?"

"You will have a match with me, and if you lose, regardless of how you will be handled by the School, you should properly study your noble education and classroom studies. At that time, you will never speak with discontent like you did

earlier. However, if you win..."

"If I win?"

"I'll teach this to you."

I laughed meaningfully, and then cast a Magic Circle from my palm. Even without listening to his reply, I understood what he was complaining about from his expression. It was indeed attractive if one was imagining an actor who played the ruffian that intended to use Magic.

Any intermediate Magic didn't need chants, and one's Control would also improve.

Well, it was clear that if this was my victory, perhaps Talcott would receive some type of punishment either way. The matter of his Control capability. The issue with avoiding damage. Talcott's age. The things related to the Count's House, and the expectations towards the future as a part of Termuilles' spirit and a Magician of the Military. If I were to include all of these things, I probably couldn't predict the extent of the punishment. Well, it depended on the thoughts of the punishing side, so I wouldn't count on that.

However, there was no relation between the match and the punishment. Studies could be conducted anywhere as long as you had the motivation. The only issue was whether Talcott could fulfill a promise related to betting his dignity.

"...As for the terms of the match, you must not kill your opponent. Advanced Magic is not allowed. In other words—"

"It would be a Chantless Beginner Magic shootout, right? It's a match, after all."

Perhaps this was a common type of Magic Battle. Chantless was quicker compared to magic circles in regards to Beginner Magic, and if it was a one-on-one battle between fellow magicians, it would be advantageous to get the first shot, since the opponent's combat efficiency would be affected if they received a direct hit, even with this kind of magic.

The one who would win would be the one that used a magic circle, even though it was a pot shot.

"So this time we won't use Circles. Shall we state the terms of defeat? Of course, losing consciousness or running away would be a loss."

"That's fine."

A smile appeared on Talcott's face. It appeared he was confident in a chantless battle.

"Theodore-sama, this is...!"

People had gathered around to see what the fuss was about. Grace was also among them.

"I'll be fine. It's just a normal match after all. Please be careful of stray Magic."

"Understood, I'll leave it to you."

Grace nodded. The outline of her shadow wiggled just slightly.

"I think I, too, will be able to help out...if an injured person appears."

Ashley placed her hand on her chest as she said that. I nodded at Ashley, then looked back towards Talcott.

//

We moved to a place that was a short distance away, where we would confront each other.

Talcott took out his Staff and took on an oblique stance. Nevertheless, it was a non-lethal, chantless magic battle, huh? It reminded me of the PvP when BFO was still in its initial stages.

"Are you making fun of me...not using a Staff?"

"You don't need to worry about that."

Although I didn't have a Magic Staff...it would only become a hindrance if I brought such a long item to the School. Besides, the main point this time around was Control. That's why, instead of attacking with Joujutsu, it would be easier to show some tactics to temper one's Control, so that even Talcott could easily understand it.

After Talcott gnashed his teeth, the end of his Magic Staff shined, and what remained in its place was a pale magic sphere, which rushed at me

counterclockwise.

A Magic Slave. By accumulating a mass of one's own mana, one could use it like a Magic Gun by manipulating mana from a distance.

Simply put, it was capable of adding some pressure in battles, so it was probably a necessary skill if you were a Magician of the Military.

Although I could use it too, due to my Circulation state...Battle Mages were Magicians who specialized in close combat. The moves we had were compensated in another manner.

"Air Bullet!"

Like a white mist, what was fired from Talcott's Staff was a wind bullet. Well, as far as non-lethal attacks go, it was the correct choice. It was hard to see it, after all.

However—

"Air Bullet."

I read the approximate path of the wind bullet that was shot from its movement and timing, and returned fire with the same Magic. The aftermath of the Magic I cast reached him, and Talcott's hair and clothes fluttered from the strong wind.

"What!?"

Talcott's eyes were wide open. It was clear that the power of my Air Bullet was above his. The range of my Magic was short, and although the power decayed faster than normal magic if it was from a bit of a distance...though, at this range, it could intercept his.

Since Wind Magic was hard to see, you needed to be far enough away to avoid it. It was easy to either protect yourself from the front or to shoot it down, and if the opposing side was running around in a shooting battle, they would only strike with effective hits that shortened the distance.

"Argh!"

By decreasing the space with ease, as though he was confident in close-combat, Talcott continued to put up with the Air Bullets I was firing at him while he ran around, trying to maintain his distance. In regards to a chantless magic

shootout using beginner magic, it was fundamental to rapidly cast the same magic, as long as they couldn't counter it.

It was necessary to remain focused on your individual control in order to change the spell to chantless magic. If it was the same magic, then one could use rapid cast without keeping a fixed focus.

I continued to shoot him down while matching his breathing. It was countermagic that read trajectories. This was done repeatedly during PvP. Besides casting Magic in my direction, Talcott's vision was swimming. After observing him, I figured out his aim and timing.

Aiming at the Magic Slave that had stayed in the air, I cast a Rank 1 Fire Spell: Cracker Bomb.

Coming in diagonally from behind, a red magic bullet clashed with the wind bullet that came from the Slave, and burst open. I also shot down the magic that came from the front with an Air Bullet.

“A Double Spell!?”

If it was chantless, then you could rapid fire one type of Magic. This was fundamental. It was like operating a car while conversing. Like doing a piano performance, with your left and right hands playing different notes. It was nothing special if you were used to such things, and Magic Manipulation was no different.

You manipulated one spell consciously, and then you manipulated another spell naturally...If you thought about it, then Life Magic was the most suitable for practicing Double Spells.

An Air Bullet from my right hand. A Cracker Bomb from my left hand. The number of my moves simply doubled.

Talcott, who fell on the ground from the approaching red bullet, unable to counter it, wouldn't be able to avoid this.

“Guwah!”

Talcott's body rolled onto the ground after taking a direct hit from an Air Bullet.

At least the counterfire that ensued should have been avoided. When not attacking with Magic, one would focus on dodging and would become unable to

use counter Magic.

Afterwards, to reflect his shots—I crossed my arms together, and it would be fine to shoot Talcott down after predicting where he would be with Wind Magic.

I instantly shortened the distance by kicking the ground with a timing that completely interrupted his counterattack.

After seizing Talcott's back, who had tried to get up, I intertwined my arms around his neck, as if crossing them. This wasn't a martial art from BFO. This was just a simple sleeper hold.

Whether or not he had expected close combat, Talcott's arteries were being pressed down on, and he was unable to react at all.

"Arghh!?"

His chant came too late, and he couldn't focus on chantless magic while taking on the Air Bullets. In particular, this situation was like his neck was being strangled.

If you couldn't think, you'd end up losing, and of course, since there was no counterattack, it matched the terms of victory for the match.

"Fall asleep."

It was easy to press down on it, since children's arms were thin. All of Talcott's strength left him in mere seconds. Well, that was good enough.

Talcott was uninjured for the most part. The School would probably prepare a suitable compromise afterwards...I wondered how that would turn out, since it was Count Moris.

--

Chapter 25

--

Chapter 25 – If There Are Downs

“Well, that just now was amazing!”

I looked back when I heard a voice behind me.

Although I was addressed by a student who wore a hooded robe that covered his eyes, he somehow managed to look excited as he approached.

His stature was similar to mine. He was the only person in my group that could maintain Life Magic from the start.

It was uncertain as to whether he was a Noble. Although it was good that his gestures and attitude were refined, I couldn’t tell whether he was a noble or a merchant, since his plain robe concealed his appearance. For now:

“...Why thank you.”

I stopped to reply to him.

Whether or not I had relayed to him that I thought he was shady, he laughed and took off his hood. What appeared was a boy with reddish brown hair.

“That was impolite of me all of a sudden. I’m called Alfred.”

“I’m Theo—?”

...Hmm? Did he say Alfred?

I looked at him again unintentionally.

It couldn’t be, Alfred Brightwelt...?

Alfred Brightwelt, the Magic Engineer. Regarding NPCs, he was one of the starting NPCs.

Although he introduced himself as Alfred, a self-proclaimed Magic Engineer...His true identity was that of the fourth Prince, Albert, of the Royal Family.

Umm, thinking back to the Game’s information...it was said that the elder

brother of Marlen, a shrine maiden of the Moon Goddess, was the fiance of Miss Ophelia, who belonged to the house of Marquiss Fobreister.

Although his relations could be guessed up to this point from the things that were narrated in the game, it was said that Alfred himself was involved with players, from handing out requests at the Adventurer's Guild to making an appearance as the fourth Prince, Albert, for other events.

He was wearing a Transformation Magic Ring. No doubt about it, he was quite confident to introduce himself as Alfred at this age.

Although it seemed that Ophelia, who would marry him later on, interacted with him since childhood...as expected, it appeared that they weren't accompanying each other.

If I had to say whether he was an enemy or an ally...then I thought Albert would be more of an ally.

After all, I could understand it at this point in time and wouldn't let my guard down, even if I knew about it one-sidedly.

Albert's influence within the Palace was weak, so he had a tendency to try to strengthen his connection with the Adventurer's Guild. I could imagine that this was the reason he took the trouble to reach out to me.

"...I'm Theodore Gartner."

"Aah. It's a pleasure."

Although I gave my full name, he only gave me his first name. Without a doubt, it would be Brightwelt if he gave it though.

He put his hand out for a handshake, so I'll give him one. It would be troublesome to deal with the situation if he realized that I knew that he was Albert, since I shouldn't know that information...Well, it should be fine? Perhaps he wasn't seeking such polite treatment while in disguise.

"U-Ugh..."

Talcott shook his head and got up.

He looked at his surroundings and then looked up at me, before he muttered dumbfoundedly.

"I...lost? To such a child?"

He just received a normal shock, huh? Will he keep the promise or not? It was hard to tell at this point. By introducing it as a match, we were careful to prevent any injuries from occurring, even if it became a shootout.

“Well then—”

With that done, I hit myself, returning to a mature attitude, and looked at Talcott.

“At least you will listen to me now. Do you have what it takes to fulfill the promise?”

“I, who lost...have no intention to complain about the victor’s decision. You’re stronger than me. Probably in everything.”

I wanted to stop such a brutish way of ruling in our human society. That was why he had received such a nickname. Well...that was fine. As long as he agreed with my words.

“Now then, please do so. As for myself, I don’t think it’s useless to train in Life Magic, receive a noble’s education, and learn in classrooms.”

I don’t think Talcott would hold a grudge against me if I said this.

“...I-Is that so?”

It would be quite easy for Talcott, who lifted up his head to listen to my lecture about magic training, to understand the principles of behavior. Although he was called a “Fierce Dog”, I understood that he was a scapegoat, so that there wouldn’t be a grudge against the eldest son, who would become the heir while exploiting his populace.

“Will Training, which tempers one’s perseverance, is connected to the improvement of one’s Control, while my different ideas and the way I think are connected to the ability to read battles, as well as the amount of knowledge that I have.”

“...Then, with the extent of your skills, should you be learning Life Magic now...?”

“It’s to decrease the amount of chore-like work that must be completed after descending into the Labyrinth. I want to get stronger, and there’s also a point to

descending the Labyrinth.”

Although I had also considered things like how we would receive income and our future prospects...there was nothing better than getting stronger.

“I-is that so?”

//

Travis took Talcott to the School’s Dean to report this. It appeared that his family, which was managed by Count Cardiff, was called.

I was on standby in one of the vacant rooms, since I wanted my instructions to remain with him. Although it was natural that Grace was with me, Ashley was also with us.

As for Alfred...he went somewhere else quite easily.

“Does Ashley-sama have any other lectures?”

“I received permission to be absent, so it’s fine. I think being a witness to this is better.”

A witness, huh? Perhaps he wouldn’t be able to step forward at will if members from the Cardiff family were there.

Although Ashley didn’t really say much, it appeared that she was worried.

“...Understood. I have some spare time, so shall we wrap up the situation with the Circulation Refining?”

After talking about many things, I thought we should try to leave now. Ashley nodded at my proposal, and smiled.

//

“...How is it?”

“It feels similar to taking a bath, then having the center of my body become warmer.”

Ashley responded to my question about her body’s condition after the Circulation Refining was completed.

I had also acquired Stamina Healing Magic, so it appeared that Ashley was spending her time more comfortably than before. The effect of Circulation Refining continued for a longer period of time, unlike Beginner Healing Magic.

However, even if that was the case, she still had to state whether her condition was good or bad. Rossetta, who was a specialist in this, was also with us now, so should I ask her opinion?

Grace was continuing with her embroidery while bathing in the sun at a nearby window. Our time passed quietly, as if the earlier disturbance had not happened.

“I want to hear about the story of your descent into the Labyrinth.”

“At the moment, we’ve reached the 12th floor. It is still one of the upper floors, so it doesn’t amount to much of a tale, you know? More interesting places will appear if we progress a bit further.”

Even though I had taken enough precautions, like preserving Mana, it was still impossible to do it all in one go. Well, let’s just call it practice.

“Theodore-sama said that there were no problems up to the 20th floor.”

“That’s because there haven’t been any Guardians.”

“Guardians?”

“Yeah, speaking of Guardians—”

It was fine to think of them as the so-called ‘Boss Characters’. However, no matter what floor you said you were on, I felt that they were wandering somewhere on the 21st and above floors. I would say that they were more like Rare Characters than Bosses.

Rossetta entered the vacant classroom after she saw Grace embroidering and the two of us on standby.

“Rossetta-sensei?”

“Hello, so Ashley was with you as well.”

She grinned broadly after noticing Ashley.

“Yeah, well, what about Talcott’s situation?”

“...Let’s see. I’ve come to relay the situation to you since his punishment has been decided.”

Rossetta shrugged.

“Personally, I’ve wondered about his story. He was unfortunately stripped of

his inheritance and was disowned by the Cardiff House."

...Well, it was a situation that would generate behavioral issues to that extent. Although he had controlled it, it was still a concern to actually use magic. If I had to give an example, then it was more serious than...swinging a knife around in a place where you had no need to take one out. Maybe it was similar to the sensation of shooting a gun and trying not to hit someone.

Although he would likely receive light disciplinary action as well as a heavy punishment...If he had been abandoned by the Count, then at the very least, he wouldn't be able to avoid being expelled from the School.

"Well, he ended up being allowed to remain in the School though."

Which was what I had expected. Rossetta commented with a wry smile.

"There are people, like the two of you, who have gained popularity from bets. This place is a school, so I'm opposed to expelling young people with promising futures like this. However, if another problem occurs, then it looks like it has been decided that it will result in...immediate expulsion."

"Well, it was certain...that if we were to talk about limiting the use of his Magic, then he wouldn't be that excellent. I understand that if this is doable, then it would even be beneficial for the country. Speaking of the promise with me, as an excuse, maybe it was good for him to be cut off from the Cardiff House."

"I wonder who exactly let the spawn of that superior Magician from the Military make decisions unhindered. Nonetheless...it's roughly as you said. He might have been expelled if he hadn't been cut off by the Count."

It was because the influence of Count Morris could be removed. Later, as long as he kept the promise, it might reach the point where he would study and reflect on various things.

"The one who protected him was the Dean...and another splendid person, even though their name wasn't mentioned, due to circumstances."

"Fumu, does that mean that person is the one who has custody over Talcott?"

"Ara, you understood it well."

"He wouldn't be commuting to school if he were cut off from his home after all."

Perhaps he was like me and had to think about saving money. Aside from that, a splendid person that didn't mention their name...right. Well, nine cases out of ten, it would be Prince Albert. As expected, he had a reason for slipping into the school incognito.

It appeared that he would create a connection with me while gaining Talcott's gratitude by extending his hand to this place, expecting future prospects since Talcott was disinherited by the Count.

Perhaps Prince Albert wanted talented people like Talcott because the base of his power was weak, and even though Talcott was a person whose connections were severed in every direction and isolated from his surroundings, he wouldn't be regarded as a problem. In short...he could only be seen as a talented person suited to be a Debauchee Prince, huh?

"Talcott said that he wanted to give you his thanks. It's thanks to you that he still has a slim connection."

"Is that so?"

Usually, I minded my own business, but even I have no right to say that. Let's consider it a favor to Albert.

--

Chapter 26

--

Chapter 26 – Ashley’s Feelings

“From time to time, we come across people with an abundance of Mana and the same symptoms as Ashley.”

Rosetta informed me of this after I listened to her thoughts about Ashley’s condition. It appeared that the symptoms would occur less frequently, due to her abundance of Mana.

Despite it being a problem of constitution, it was an integral part of her life, since it would occur more easily if she was linked up to her Mana.

“In other words, her tendency to get fevers and fall ill is something secondary that results from her constitution. For this reason, using Magic, medicine, and other treatments of the like won’t necessarily stop the symptoms. As for a solution, there’s honing one’s Mana Control and training one’s mind and body.”

“Then, what about continuing her treatment with my Circulation Refining?”

After I asked her, Rosetta narrowed her eyes slightly.

“I think your method is really effective. I’ve also researched ways to learn Mana Circulation, but there weren’t many records of it, and I found that I wasn’t suited for it anyways. That’s why...it’s quite surprising that you are able to use it.”

“...Then I will continue Ashley-sama’s healing like this.”

“I think that’s fine. It’s something I’ve rarely encountered.”

Rosetta might be linked to various things, such as the reason she had set her heart on Healing Magic and the original purpose of mom’s Cursed Artifact, which suppresses the traits of one’s race.

Rosetta never asked about what kind of circumstances led me to learn Mana

Circulation.

Was she being considerate of mom?
This seemed to be different though. I think she wanted me to become more adept with it if it's something only I can use.
That's why she was certain of the potential that I'm expected to reach.

Rosetta smiled gently, but her expression quickly changed, as though she just remembered something.

"Ah, it will help me if you can stay here for a little longer."

"You still need something?"

Talcott's matter seemed to have been resolved, and I had also asked her what I needed to ask.

I didn't think there was any reason to remain in this empty classroom.

"Hmm. It's not like you guys have something to do. It's just a standard meeting—"

"—It's problematic, Count! This person has no relation to you and only happened to be there!"

"What are you saying? I ought to at least greet him if he took care of my good-for-nothing son, right?"

Rosetta pressed a finger to her forehead after hearing the voices from the opposite side of the corridor.

"...Even though I told you not to involve that much."

...I see. A meeting, right. So the person himself had come to attend?

"Is it here!?"

A middle-aged man violently threw open the door of the classroom and burst in. Although he was handsome, he gave off the feeling of a crude person.
Count Morris, huh?

He looked around the room before resting his gaze on me. The dissatisfied look he was wearing changed to a smile the instant he saw me. His smile didn't reach his eyes though.

"So, it's you, right? I heard you stopped Talcott for me."

Morris extended both of his hands outwards as he approached me while wearing a precarious expression.

"Lord Cardiff, he is—"

Although Rosetta tried to interject, Morris cut her off with a smile on his face.

"You sure are something. I'll only express my gratitude to my benefactor. Stand aside."

"Well, about that, Aah—"

"It appears you have business with me."

I shouldn't trouble Rosetta with my problems. Grace and Ashley stood up and stepped in front of Rosetta. Well well, he was completely shameless. He was an obnoxious fellow who was only half-shrewd.

"I see. I'm Morris Tram Cardiff, the current head of the Cardiff family.

"I'm Theodore Gartner."

I introduced myself while following the proper etiquette. I decided to give introductions that matched his.

"It seems Talcott was under your care. It's really amazing considering your age. It's also good that neither of you were injured."

Hmm, to summarize, he liked that there were no injuries, instead of being displeased with Talcott's behaviour and punishment. He was pleased that both I, who suppressed Talcott uninjured, and Talcott, who was unable to injure me, were unscathed. Was he concerned with saving his dignity? Perhaps he was looking down on us because we were younger. Rather, I think he would appear quite suspicious if he felt ashamed at this place and time.

"It was due to deciding the rules before the match."

That was the truth.

If I had thought that powerful Magic with the intent to kill was going to be used, then I would have adopted a fighting style that could nullify them without fail.

"I see, I see. It was really splendid. You also seem to be well-versed in etiquette, this is wonderful."

"I'm sorry for troubling you."

"However, I don't recall hearing of you. It's certain that there were two heirs to the family of Count Gartner, so which side are you from?"

"Neither."

"Hou? You're an illegitimate child then?"

He narrowed one of his eyes, and the edges of his mouth rose. He was donning a scornful smile.

"Oh yeah, I've something to ask. It's related to another person of the Gartner House that I've been concerned with. I mustn't be rude about it. I've thought about which of the brothers you are, so I came to express my greetings. It seems like I've guessed wrong."

What did he guess wrong? Did he know of my origins...since the beginning? I had thought that he would come to do something. In short, it meant that he was trying to provoke me and take revenge, or extract some form of profit from me. If that was the case, then he miscalculated. If he felt that he had grasped my weakness by figuring out I was an illegitimate child, then—

"Your mother is famous as a Holy Maiden...but she wasn't a Noble, right?"

"Count Morris!"

"Risa-sama's matter is—!"

Rossetta's voice seemed aggravated. Grace also understood this, as she knocked over her chair and stood up.

Morris paid no attention to the girls and continued speaking to me while smirking.

"Five years ago, was it? I've washed my hands of that problem, since I was here. It appears there was an excess of people of lowly birth that, even in my territory, died a dog's death. It truly was a calamity."

Lowly birth...you say? Died a dog's death, you say?

Should a man like you even say such a thing? You're simply a pig whose belly grew fat.

Like you have any right to talk about my mother's way of life and the way she died!

He, he, I'll kill—

"What do you understand about it?!"

I had initiated a technique to make the pig in front of me vanish from this world.

What cooled my mind was that angry voice.

Eh...Ashley?

Ashley had yelled that with such intensity that tears formed in her eyes.

Ashley's threatening aura solidified with a surprised look...as Grace gripped her ring and Rosetta struck out in Morris's direction.

"What do YOU understand about it?! About Risa-sama?! About us?! A lot of people were saved because she was there! And that's not the only thing! My mother and father were avenged! Your words are insulting her! Have some shame!"

Oh, was that it? She had known about this?

So that was why she was fond of Grace as well.

"Young lady...do you understand who it is that you're speaking to?"

"Do you yourself understand what you are saying!? As the head of the Baron Shirn family, I cannot overlook the fact that both the benefactor of this family and my parents, who were of lowly birth, were despised!"

"Baron Shirn you say...?"

Although the status is lower looking at it from the count's side, with this timing, I thought he is very clumsy to have these 'lost points' pile up. (TN: mark of a failure)

Morris furrowed his brows for a moment.

Feeling as though the situation was no longer favourable for him and that it would continue to deteriorate, he clicked his tongue as he left the room.

Although he didn't let it show in his expression, it appeared he despised other noble heads adverse to him.

Even with the timing being unfavourable for him, I thought him to be quite incompetent to have allowed these missteps to pile up, as Ashley's status was lower than his.

However, I understood it. I understood it, you know.
This situation allowed Ashley, who became furious for my mother's sake, to save face and not be responsible for getting angry.
On the other hand...it was now certain that he was my enemy.
Without a doubt, I'll be sure to repay him for these words.

"I-I'm sorry. Theodore-sama, I—"

Ashley covered her mouth and let out a small sob.

"There is no need for Ashley-sama to apologize."

Blood dripped from Grace's fingernails since she tried to forcibly remove her ring. Rosetta was also taking deep breaths as though calming her anger.
Haah. It was quite unreasonable. Perhaps one of us three would have struck that pig had Ashley's voice reached us even a little later. Although I would have had no remorse in that case, it would have undoubtedly become troublesome.

I calmed down. In exchange for Ashley's outburst, she said the thoughts I wanted to voice.

Only that it was conducted in a calmer manner.

If I had done things my way, the situation might have come to a close more quickly. However, what if that had put Grace or Rosetta in a tight spot as a result?

Although I judged that pig to be worthless scum, I will never allow myself to fall into a situation where he had the upper hand.

I let out a large breath.

"...Grace, your hand."

"I-I'm very sorry. I—"

"It's fine. I understand."

I took Grace's powerless, exhausted hands that were wrapped around Ashley's shoulders, and cast Healing Magic.

Ashley had yelled that much. Under these circumstances, wasn't Ashley the one who was the least related to my mother? It was certain that Ashley had done as much as she could.

The things my mother accomplished, and the things she risked her life to complete.

That someone besides my relatives understood how highly I thought of them, it was because there was a mature child, like Ashley, huh?

"...Thank you very much, Ashley-sama."

Ashley shook her small head. She ended up apologizing and saying, "Sorry," but why? Perhaps she herself didn't know why she was apologizing.

It probably wasn't the first time she had become truly furious like that. Ashley wasn't even at fault.

After I wiped her cheeks with a handkerchief, she lifted her head with a surprised look, and began to cry freely.

--

Chapter 27

--

Chapter 27 – Countermeasure

Everyone decided to head to Rosetta's house after waiting for Ashley to calm down.

What Rosetta was talking about was working out a Remedy.

Well...the thing she fears is something we know about.

Perhaps Ashley was considering the same things that I was thinking of as we brought her along, even though she would've just returned to her dorm if that were true.

Ashley had a dumbfounded look as she sat on the chair in the guest room.

"There is a possibility that Morris considers Ashley an enemy."

"Me?"

"In other words, Ashley-sama reacted to things related to my mom, so he might see a connection between the two of us. If he gathers a bit of information, then I think the reason why I left the house would reach Morris's ears, to some extent."

I was just a normal illegitimate child who cut ties with my family, so it was possible that he would see Ashley as my backer if we considered that she was a Lord.

However, how would Morris make sense of the reason Ashley had gotten angry? I shouldn't expect the way he reads things to be reliable.

He was a guy who would try to force his way through people like me with his own style. It is kind of like being able to judge his personality based on a single instance.

Specifically, the people who were friendly with Morris might...exercise their true power directly if the physical and mental harassment pointed towards

Ashley worsened.

Perhaps it was natural to prepare before that happened if we were talking about her personal safety.

“Even if it’s like that, a Count is still a Count. It doesn’t mean that there isn’t a connection between height and width, you know. The case this time may deepen the discord. Speaking of the ones who support Morris, they are guys who either have a certain obligation to the Cardiff House or are more ruffian-like people.”
(TL: I don’t know what the height and width thing is referring to.)

In short, the people who remained by him and felt that they were close with Morris were our seniors in status. I suppose their dispositions were bad for that reason alone.

“Are you referring to how you will ensure Ashley-sama’s safety?”

“Something like that.”

Rosetta nodded at Grace’s words.

Although it might make Ashley anxious, perhaps it was necessary to relay these things to her.

You need to be aware of who you can protect, and as you protect them, a part of it will put you into a difficult position.

Even as these words were exposed, Ashley shook her head without losing her composure.

“Having me cause trouble as I please is...”

Perhaps Ashley wanted to say that she would take responsibility for her actions herself.

I wouldn’t say it was impossible. She was the head of a Baron house, so I think we could resort to something like requesting the assistance of nobles who were close with Baron Shirn.

“No, it’s the opposite.”

“The opposite?”

“Someone among us would have exercised their true power if Ashley-sama hadn’t said those things for us.”

“...That’s right.”

“Seriously. I, too, lack in training.”

The three of us looked at each other before heaving a sigh that matched neither our relief nor our depression.

Geez...Even if it was that kind of situation, I had to try to behave myself more calmly.

“With that out of the way, it’s natural for us to give our full support to Ashley-sama for the current case. I want it to be like this as well.”

After I locked gazes with Ashley, she finally nodded, even though she looked back at me for a while.

“T-Thank you very much.”

“Although it will be difficult to figure out how to face this situation—”

The first thing to consider was how to ensure Ashley’s safety, since I was confident that the Count would counterattack and meddle with us.

It was possible that Prince Albert would make an appearance if this reached his ears.

Although I didn’t know what his reason would be, whether it was an obligation or for profits...it would be because the Count had taken action.

It weighed heavily on the reality that the Count picked a quarrel with a Baron, so there was no way the Prince would make a move if he was trying to keep a distance from this situation and behave himself. Prince Albert was a little too optimistic without relying on someone and striking a deal with them from the beginning, since his foundation wasn’t solid in the first place.

“For now, I think it’s better to avoid staying at the dorm, where several people could be going in and out. You should move to a separate area to live.”

“This, for example...are you saying that I should return to the Shirn territory?”

Although that was probably one solution...Ashley’s expression wasn’t really certain. Well, she was paying her school fees, and although she had Kennel and Beline’s expectations, it appeared that she had other reasons besides my matters.

"...If you would rather not, then I would want it to move in a direction where that won't happen. This time, we ended up troubling you with the foolishness of the School's response, right? In regards to the lectures you are supposed to take, I'll accommodate you to the best of my abilities."

I wonder if she would become one of those house tutors? The frequency at which humans placed their trust in others like this was fine for lectures, since the matter was connected to her safety.

As for the reason Beline suggested that she study at Termuilles, part of it was probably related to Ashley's network.

Speaking of the antagonistic relationship she had towards the Count, it would affect Ashley and her surroundings even if she had this information, regardless of whether it was good or bad.

The enemy of an enemy is an ally. The opposite of that was also true. Not having a good impression of the Count would make one an ally, and one would be an enemy if it wasn't like that. For example, it's like Rossetta, Prince Albert, and myself.

As long as Talcott listened to the details from Rossetta, he would probably attach himself to Prince Albert.

Besides settling the details, I didn't really want events regarding the 'Unnecessary' Talcott, who was involved with this, and Rossetta, who reported all the circumstances, to reach my ears...It appeared that Talcott was punished by Morris right before he was disowned.

I was speaking of being blown away by magic, persistently refusing to give in as he was defeated, and being healed by Rossetta.

Rossetta knew of the quarrel this time, or maybe it was more that she came to report it to me.

While I was on standby in one of the vacant rooms, she had appeared to be quite confused over there.

Albert was definitely occupied with Talcott, and perhaps he would talk about what intentions Morris had in regards to dealing with Talcott.

Although I didn't understand what Talcott thought of this, if it were me, I would get angry at being forced to do dirty work in order to preserve the reputation of my eldest brother.

Well, with such a matter, I wonder if Albert will move accordingly, thinking about various things.

"Well, I'll consider renting a home or staying at an inn then."

Later on, it would be fine to protect that place. It would become a discussion like that.

I also had the Mercury Shadow, which could guard her.

"Hmm, well...that's fine, but there are other ways too, you know."

Rossetta glanced at Grace and me, then she looked at Ashley again.

"Ashley...I think your surroundings will become quite noisy, even if these events are cleaned up. Thinking ahead, isn't it better to consider working out the details for these things?"

"Noisy? Why?"

"In the first place, you would catch the attention of the people who oppose Morris."

Hmm...Speaking of Morris' enemies, it was an issue of wanting to form a party with people who matched our interests.

Creating personal relationships even served as a means of creating allies and, at the same time, creating enemies.

"As the head of Shirn, having the talent to use Healing Magic is remarkable. In addition to that, it's inevitable to have a fiance. Although bachelors and suitors would come even if the Healer has a similar age to me...There are also idiots who will try to ask you about such things by using force and their authority. As long as you live in a dorm or live in a rented house that employs servants...you can't be unrelated to these problems. To resolve this, you will have to decide who you will be with. As such, Theodore-kun...no, it might turn out to be three people. What do you think about this?"

I think Rossetta is taking a stab at arousing Ashley's interest.

...Rossetta was also thinking about such things? Moreover, she mentioned the two of us.

It appeared that even Beline had thought about it like that from the beginning... How would other people view Grace's and my behavior?

Well, it was certain. Perhaps letting me stay at Rossetta's house was a means of protecting Ashley. As for me, I had thought that it would be like that at Rossetta's house, though.

It wasn't for a normal period of time, and was more temporary. There was even a reason to it, since we were fellow children. Also, speaking of letting Ashley stay at my house and guarding her there, considering our future, it would be equal to declaring our intimacy with each other to everyone around us.

"Well...isn't this too sudden?"

I understand that such a story won't allow any delays. Rossetta inclined her head.

"Ara? Ashley is the head of a Baron family, and you've been gathering attention, so do you not think things like 'it's too quick to reach a conclusion,' or 'you don't understand it' at all? This also includes how those who have yet to get a fiance will react to the present situation and take action."

"That is..."

...Rather, they might have already taken action. It was Morris's faction. Besides knowing that there was a connection between Ashley and me, there was also a possibility of viewing our relationship in that way. If Morris used people and resorted to using force, then perhaps he would conclude it to be common sense without any regards to the actual situation of his surroundings.

"Henri...might have been thinking about your future, which includes Grace. In regards to a boy who is skilled enough to use Magic to that extent, you understand that your companion won't end with just one person, right?"

Ah...

Rossetta was different from Beline and was quite honest, not involving her own interests, so, as a result, it would become a straight ball that would bring this matter to an end if we were to proceed with this?

What Dad had planned for Grace's and my future didn't matter. Rossetta would likely accompany Ashley as a Healing Magic professor, and it appeared that she knew of the circumstances by which I came to Ashley's side, so she introduced herself as a common acquaintance of mine...Perhaps she also

knew the meaning of Ashley coming to me.

I understood that this wasn't something that could be delayed for long.

Attention was gathering around Ashley and me due to the situation with the Cardiff Family, huh? Well, that was for sure.

Ashley blushed lightly, and Grace...was rather quiet, as usual.

"Well, the important thing is the feelings of the people in question. How about the three of you stay at my house today and talk about things slowly? As for me, the time I have to teach Ashley Healing Magic will increase, so it's fine for her to stay at my house. It's just—"

Rossetta said that and looked towards a place far off into the distance.

"I think you should make sure to not leave any feelings behind, if you have them. Whether or not you relay your feelings and understand each other, there will be farewells unrelated to that. I wonder why."

--

Chapter 28

--

Chapter 28 – The Future of the Path We Will Continue On

“Speaking of studying at Termuilles, it was something my father once mentioned. Although he seemed quite worried as he spoke of it...he also took a marriage proposal with Theodore-sama into consideration.”

“I think Beline-san has some expectations as well. She has extremely high hopes for us, but I haven’t accomplished anything yet. That’s why, as Ashley-sama’s friend, we both understand each other’s thoughts on the matter. However, I wanted to talk about this more slowly.”

Ashley nodded at my words with a serious expression.
Rosetta prepared some tea and then left the room.

I closed my eyes. I pondered over Ashley’s matters: what she had said to Morris, and what had happened until now.
Although she was similar to me, I still wanted to discuss her way of life and thought process...
On top of finding a solution to her condition, I felt that she wanted to become a respectable Noble.
However, this was only an assumption based on what Grace said.
She seemed to be heading down a thorny path similar to Mom’s.
It seemed to me that she felt admiration and respect for my mother, as well as a sense of obligation to her.
That’s why she was supporting...huh? Ah, I understood what Grace wanted to say.

Thinking of Ashley, she was just a child with a dream. It would have been easy to abandon that dream if she did know the truth of the situation.
The humiliating words that he spoke were intended to make us conscious of it.
We were children, but what was wrong with that?

Besides, I knew that my mother was a person who strove to live by her ideals until the end. It was said that she detested Demons and fought them during that winter five years ago, ultimately passing away without extending her hand towards anyone that came to save her.

Grace had informed Mom that she would be saved if she drank Grace's blood, but Mom refused Grace in the end. Had she been concerned about Grace's body?

If she had accepted, Mom might have continued to exist as a vampire, but perhaps she didn't have any confidence about being safe from contracting that sickness as a Dhampir.

At that time, the ones who saved Mom and brought her back were the Adventurers who were contracted to her. Dad had left his territory and was absent when it was leisure season for the farmers. It was too late by the time Dad found out about the situation. The memories of Kagehisa that I have left... through them, I understood the thoughts of those who left Mom behind. Perhaps they couldn't afford the risk, but it was likely that they were worried that they would be infected with a Cursed-Sickness, or that they themselves could never help. Perhaps they were afraid that they wouldn't be able to follow through even if they did attempt to help. There were various factors like these in that situation, and their hands were shaken off by the children who understood them.

It was on a night when the snow fell. I could never forget the backs of the adults who left.

However, until the end, Mom never complained. After understanding her reasoning, they couldn't have agreed to it. You didn't have to be capable of doing everything. They should have been happy with just giving a word of thanks to Mom. She never wanted to bring about an ending where someone would be abandoned. That was why I gave up hope on those guys and left the House. As to how events would progress after leaving the house, it wasn't something that I could predict just yet.

Whether it's Grace or Ashley, they are people who I have acknowledged and will support, walk alongside, and protect.

It would be fine even if it wasn't always me in this role. I was confident that there

were others who felt the same out there, and it would be great if Ashley and Grace encountered dependable people by chance.

On the topic of marriage...especially for the head of a family, they didn't have the freedom of choice. In short, I wasn't confident in being able to marry someone from an unknown place. Fortunately, such a person had not appeared yet.

"Even if you say something at this point, it's probably just a desire. Freely breaking off an engagement with Ashley-sama is meaningless if we don't accomplish anything by doing so. Even so, allow me the right to be involved in your life."

I could become a bulwark for Ashley on various issues by having her become my fiance.

However, all of this was for my personal gain. I wanted to use this chance to avoid seeing what I didn't want to see. I moved for myself, and only myself. It couldn't be helped if Ashley became disillusioned, but I couldn't live the way Mom did, and I had no intentions of doing so.

No matter what way of life Ashley chose in the future, my evaluation of her would never change. I wouldn't forget the words that were said by Morris. I just needed to let the girls know of the prerequisites. If I was able to, I would grab hold of everything and run.

Ashley took a deep breath after taking in my words and quietly responded.

"Ever since my parents passed away...Kennel never really let me go outside. I was afraid of going outside as well. I had accepted that as reasonable at the time. There had always been a lot of people at my side because I often fell ill ever since my youth. I thought of what I was and wasn't capable of doing. My brother was always there for me, after all."

...Things she was capable of doing, huh?

"But, even Brother didn't return. I was suddenly told that I was the head, but I didn't understand what I was supposed to do. I've heard about it countless times though, that the one who avenged my mom and dad was—"

"My mom, right?"

Ashley closed her eyes and nodded.

"I've been told of Risa-sama's story countless times, from people who were like legends to me. I've always admired...such people. I thought about standing up straight and looking ahead because I wanted to become like Risa-sama, even though I was always weak. Kennel was patiently waiting for the day when I would stand up and work towards my own goals."

She stared straight into my eyes as she said this.

"I think you already know everything that I know on the matter. I wondered about whether you truly were Risa-sama's son when I listened to Oslo, as well as when I heard that you were from the Gartner Family. When I heard that, I ran out of the house."

This surely was...perhaps she wanted to apologize to me. She admired Mom. That was why she wanted me to forgive her, for her sake. Her words would be interpreted as such. So...it wasn't only me, she also spoke with Grace about Mom, huh? They became quite friendly.

"But, I want Theodore-sama to forgive me and accept me, along with my bothersome condition. You're very mysterious, and I was happy. I also realized that such a thing was the continuation of my fairy tale. I thought that anything would be possible for me with a healthy body. That was why I prevented Theodore-sama and Grace-san from leaving on this unpleasant note, as it would have separated us."

"It was on that night, right? The night you dropped by and wanted to talk to me about something."

Ashley nodded at Grace's words.

"It was something I couldn't possibly have let Theodore-sama hear...no matter what."

"But Ashley-sama has known about me since the beginning, right?"

I had even heard rumours that Mom took care of Grace. That was why Ashley wasn't scared even if she was a Dhampir, huh? Without knowing the details, it may have seemed that Mom's final wishes were for both Grace and I to be taken care of.

"Yes. I thought the two of you were incredible and suited each other well."

Ashley's expression became cloudy for a moment after she smiled at us.

"Besides being a Noble, I plan to consider some matters for a while longer. I think it is still early for me to consider matters such as marriage proposals."

I didn't know the extent to which Kennel had taught her about matters that involved marriage proposals, though.

At the very least, it seemed that she hadn't considered it thoroughly.

"...However, after speaking about the matter with the two of you...It would be nice to stay by your side. Will you forgive me for feeling this way?"

"I'm not a stranger. Ashley-sama can agree to this if it's you. Ashley-sama had been waiting to relate to you the words she wanted to relay to Risa-sama after all."

The words she wanted to relay to Mom, huh?

Perhaps I wanted to hear those words from another person's mouth.

"My response was already relayed, you know. It won't change."

I responded as such while the two of them looked at me.

Both of them smiled in response.

"Shall I go make some tea?"

Just as we finished our conversation, a knocking sound resounded throughout the room, and Rosetta entered the guest room with a strange smile on her face as she brought in a tea set. This timing...

She quickly poured some tea and laid out some tea cakes.

"Were you waiting at the door?"

Rosetta's expression hardened as she heard my retort, and her eyes began to swim.

"Well...it doesn't matter."

She was also truly worried.

As for her, who lived at Termuilles, although I had thought that she had no relations to me besides her connection to Dad, perhaps she thought otherwise.

However, I was given the cold shoulder by House Gartner, and I came to Termuilles as a result, so did she perhaps want to meddle with my affairs because she had some lingering regret regarding Mom?

The stringent feelings she held regarding Dad hinted towards the reason she acted this way.

...The events from tomorrow onwards, huh? We had plenty of time. I wondered if I should allow Rosetta to join in and consult with her. There was no doubt in my mind that she had taken an interest in us.

--

Chapter 29

--

Chapter 29 – Familiar Caduceus

“How is it?”

Today’s breakfast was white bread, fish soup, and a salad with bacon. It seemed that Ashley was the one in charge of the soup’s flavor. It was a situation that made you gaze at the soup and hold your breath anxiously as you brought it to your mouth.

“It’s delicious.”

It was a bit sour and had a light flavor.

“Ashley-sama has progressed quite rapidly.”

All of the housework done by Ashley was under Grace’s guidance. Although I doubted that the head of a Baron household had to do housework...it appeared that Ashley longed for a life of making homemade meals for her husband, similar to those she had read about in books from a study. Ashley’s condition was also improving, since the Circulation Refining had become a daily routine, and it seemed she was happy that she could move her body more freely. Just like that, three people were currently carrying about inside the house. After we finished breakfast, we had moved to the living room to drink tea and have a light chat.

Although a feeling similar to accommodating every one of our plans had developed ever since we took a short rest—

“Excuse me.”

Grace was snuggled next to me on the couch in the living room and had been leaning lightly against me. Ashley was a bit more modest and nervously held my hand. We were close enough so that we could feel each other’s body heat, and

although I had accidentally ended up sitting up straight...ummm.

As for Grace, a reliever for her vampiric impulses was necessary, so I had decided to put aside the necessary time where I would touch and hug her. If she was starved of contact, then she would build up stress.

That was why, until now, maintaining our daily lives...was still okay. Since Ashley was just looking at me, the two of them had proposed spending time like this.

Although I tried to say that they weren't that awkward, it seemed these girls lacked some knowledge. We were currently in an era comparable to the time of Japan's greatness education or its information society.

I understood that Grace was a bit detached from the common sense of society. Although Ashley had tried to prod at that a bit...it appeared that the education she had received was merely to prepare her to be a Noble. It looked like she didn't really know that marriages between Nobles were generally more of an obligation.

Although the two of them did say that they didn't care if I was shameless and abandoned them, they clearly stated that they had no intentions of leaving me at all. Hmm.

If I took into account our age, knowledge, present positions, and our futures...then we needed to do things properly. Nothing would change before this. In other words, this was a test of my logic and endurance. My suggestion was to try it after breakfast. It was better to endure it to that extent if we had plans later on.

“Hah, this sure is calming.”

“I've realized a lot of things. Spending time with the two of you is like being with...Father and Mother.”

“Oh, Caduceus has returned.”

A black liquid intruded from the closed window. Just as I thought that a black pool had finished forming on the floor, a large figure rose up from the center...it took on the appearance of a black cat. Its body was about...50% larger than that of a normal cat. As for its eyes, they shone with a metallic brilliance.

It was a magic creature, the familiar Shadow Mercury. We named it Caduceus.

Although its liquid body was originally amorphous, as was evident, it had a solidification skill.

Currently, it was guarding the house at night. Specifically, it could spread out into a mesh, and had currently taken the role of observing the entire house. The body of the Shadow Mercury felt like an eyeball or a brain. It was also capable of detecting incidences within a large radius as if they had occurred within the palm of its hand.

Perhaps it was well suited as a night guard due to its black color.

“Report.”

The shape of a black cat collapsed after I ordered Caduceus, who was sitting on top of the table, to report.

Just like that it reduced its size and took on the form of the property. It allowed him to reproduce the people he had scanned coming and going from night until morning since it was tiny.

Caduceus replayed its memories three-dimensionally. Although it was something like watching the screen of a surveillance camera...its replays were detailed enough to show things like the clothes of the people who were coming and going.

Perhaps these replays would reveal a blindspot in Caduceus's Perception ability. Although the Shadow Mercury's stats were dependent on the owner's blood, which was used as a material and provided by Grace and I...Caduceus' stats were high, beyond the expectations of Beatrice, the Alchemist we asked to make it. It cost 1500 Kilig. Well, it was a bargain.

Speaking of why I would do such a thing, it was as a countermeasure against crime and people like Count Morris. Well, it was something along those lines.

“That person hasn't moved since earlier.”

What Grace pointed out was a person who was standing in the corner of the wall at the back of our house. It was someone wearing a hood, and I didn't know if they were visiting...but I saw that they were looking around hurriedly and examining their surroundings.

To put it simply, it was clearly suspicious behavior.

“Perhaps they are related to Count Cardiff?”

"If that's so, it's strange to behave like that."

Rather than saying that they were observing our house, it was more like they were being cautious of the surrounding traffic. The best description I could give would be that, although it appeared like they were observing us, the person was approaching our house because they were taking cover.

After paying attention to this person for a while, they finally put their hands on the hood and exposed their face.

After that, its head and ears, which were the features of a beast, shivered slightly, and then it put on the hood again and left.

"It's someone from the Beast Race...right?"

On top of the Mini was one black ear, which it could use to listen. So, it was someone of the Beast Race who was being cautious of our house's surroundings. I hadn't the slightest idea as to why though. I couldn't see them as a person from the Count's house or as someone under the Prince.

"Caduceus, did you record the size and appearance of this person?"

The Mini's form changed, and then it took on the form of a mini beast person. It was possible to distinguish its clothing...but Caduceus didn't understand the vital parts of their appearance that well, so it seemed that was its blindspot.

"...Inform me if you find people within the town with a stature similar to this beast person."

While still looking like a beast person, Caduceus nodded. I'd like to ask them about their story if it was something I could do. However, since I didn't know what their purpose was, I should also consider the chance that they could suddenly attack me if I were to speak with them. It was a rather difficult situation.

"Well, let's put this person on hold. What are your plans for today Ashley?"

Ashley had become my fiance after all. I had decided not to use the tone and manners of a stranger whenever I spoke with her. It was correct to say that I would show her my usual self.

"I have Rossetta-sensei's lecture today. She said that today, the lecture is on

protective and strengthening magic.”

...The lectures Rossetta taught were beyond Healing Magic. Regardless of Ashley becoming my fiance, it seemed she planned to teach her such cards. Ashley was capable of learning without limiting herself to Healing Magic.

Rossetta said that, if she became a Lord who could use Healing Magic, then she should gather combat experience, since she would have to return when her territory had abnormal Demon outbreaks or was under attack.

In short, perhaps what she meant was that she could descend into the Labyrinth if she raised her skill in Magic a bit more.

Experience was a bonus if one defeated Demons within the Labyrinth in BFO. It seemed this was true in reality as well, and it would show up as an increase in one's strength, stamina, and Mana if they continued to defeat Demons within the Labyrinth.

It wasn't that she would limit herself because it was a combat experience, it was more that Ashley had a constitution where she would easily become ill, like Mom.

It appeared that she had shown some improvement...by resorting to descending into the Labyrinth little by little, and tempering her body with Rossetta while she was young.

If I had to say it, it was similar to using Labyrinth Leveling as a way to stay fit. Bringing Ashley along with us now meant that her Magic was almost ready for combat.

Rossetta would probably get a feel for her eventually, more or less. Perhaps it would become a wait-and-see situation while she provides support on the safer floors. I should get a Red Dimension Stone before that.

“I'll head out with Caduceus for a bit if Rossetta is coming. Please look after Grace as well after I put her in her Released State.”

“What do you plan to do?”

“I'll walk around by myself and do some shopping.”

Although I had decent, passable staves and robes, I planned to fish out the enemies that were acting independently.

Chapter 30

Xant: We had to drop back to 1 chapter a Saturday, some chapters coming up are hella long and it delayed tl speed. Also our camping trip was a disaster.

--

Chapter 30 – Beast Thief Sheila

“Thank you very much.”

I heard the voice of the shopkeeper behind me as I left the Magic Tool shop. They didn't have any Magic Staves that met my requirements, which was to have excellent durability whenever I activated Magic that was used with Joujutsu. Although I had thought I would immediately acquire a suitable Staff if I headed to Termuilles...Battlemages were rare in the first place, and there weren't any equals around. Naturally, the result was that there was nothing that suited my needs.

I wonder if I should look for treasure chests in the lower levels or collect materials and request for them to be made?

On the other hand, I did find a Magician's coat. Although it wasn't a robe and I had not been looking for one, it was an item woven from Luna Worm silk, so it was quite good.

The cost to strengthen it with additional magic was 400 Kilig. Its performance was sufficient if I considered the price.

(ED: Staffs -> Staves)

I quickly put on the coat and left the store.

I had contemplated going around town a bit more, but I noticed a vibration, as if someone's feet were striking the ground. This was a signal from Caduceus, who was hiding in the shadows.

...Was it that beast person? Although I didn't know if they were pursuing something somewhere, it was still a suspicious reaction as I came out of the store. It seemed that this person was caught in Caduceus's surveillance.

Without looking around, I began walking, pretending that I hadn't noticed them.

I closed my left eye and linked my senses and vision with the Familiar.

With my right eye, I saw the scenery in front of me. With my left eye, I linked with Caduceus's senses so I could see behind me.

There appeared to be a hooded person amongst the crowd, walking with their face down and slightly detached from the others.

For now, let's make it so that they would be hard pressed to come up with an excuse.

Pretending to stroll about the town, I led myself down an old street, the same one in Kagehisa's memories.

I went around the corner, which lead into a back alley, and just as I was cut off from the vision of people in the opposite direction, I activated Mana Circulation. Then I jumped from wall to wall until I reached the top of a building.

After the person, who had shadowed me until reaching that corner, took a moment to fortify themselves, they began to run towards the end of the back alley with a look of slight panic, since they had suddenly lost sight of me.

"Well then."

At this point, it had turned into me chasing my pursuer.

However, this was neither a game of tag nor was it sneaking around. Further ahead was a dead end, after all.

I knew every nook and cranny around here, since I had set up Termuilles as my home base in BFO.

I had also roamed the streets and examined every last detail as I pleased.

I'm especially familiar with the old streets near the center of Termuilles.

The elements and structures that were said to divert portions of the Labyrinth probably wouldn't change for the better in the future.

When the person who was pursuing me got to the open space that was surrounded by buildings with no exit, they looked around here and there, wondering why I vanished. They looked up towards the high walls and also confirmed whether or not there were any gaps that one could pass through in between the buildings.

"Who are you looking for?"

The beast person looked back after hearing the voice behind them, as if they had flicked their head.

“...I’m a bit lost.”

It was a girl’s voice.

Although I had planned on figuring out how to deal with them after seeing how they acted, it appeared that this person wouldn’t suddenly attack me. I should deal with her peacefully if that was the case. I wouldn’t let her feign ignorance and run away, though.

“Is that so? So you were lost at the back of my house last night too?”

I could tell that she had gulped under her hood.

“After all, aren’t you looking for someone?”

“...How?”

She asked how?

How did I realize she was shadowing me? Or how I got behind her? Could it be that she knew about last night?

“Magicians should be prepared for all kinds of things. Won’t you show me your face first?”

After I said that, the beast person shrugged her shoulders slightly. It felt like she had given up. The girl’s face was revealed when she took off her hood. Her large, triangular ears twitched.

“I’m not anyone suspicious, is what I want to say. I don’t plan on hurting you.”

“I’ll believe you if I’m satisfied with your reason after listening to it.”

I felt that she wasn’t someone who was observing my house. It would be better to trust her.

“I’m Sheila. I’m looking for a missing friend.”

“Then, why me?”

Sheila narrowed her slit eyes and responded.

“Snakebite.”

...Them, huh? I had thought that she was linked to the Count's House, though. A lost friend, right. It was possible that they might be involved with Snakebite's kidnapping incident.

Sheila opened her mouth again after we had looked at each other silently. I decided to keep a poker face going for as long as I could, in order to ask about her.

"I've heard that you had a struggle with Snakebite and went as far as to catch them. I also heard that you're fighting with the Cardiff House. Cardiff's army might show up if you are involved."

Hmm...What was that? Was she trying to say that there was a connection between Snakebite and the Cardiff House?

If she was wandering around here and knew about me, she had probably heard about the incident with the Cardiff House.

It could be that details on both parties had been provided for the sake of attracting my interest or confusing someone.

It was also hard to obtain Snakebite's information, since the Adventurer's Guild made it forbidden to talk about it...At least, the things I struggled with should probably be known to them.

"Will you listen to me? We might be able to help each other out."

Sheila tilted her head without changing her expression.

If she was unable to take secretive actions, then she would get ahold of me and become allies, huh? Well, that was reasonable.

"I'll just listen to you. I might not be able to give an answer, though."

I had also been requested to keep quiet about Snakebite and received money from the Adventurer's Guild.

Other than receiving money, this was probably also a contract. A part of this consisted of trust, so it wasn't something that I should be talking about to the extent where one would 'take an interest' in it.

"I'll make the long story short then. My friend, who was involved in the production of labyrinth maps at the Adventurer's Guild, had spoken with Snakebite and knew about the events. The Cardiff House had frequented the building that Snakebite used."

"...In other words, the party involved, the Cardiff House, guided Snakebite and involved your friend, who is now missing?"

The Cardiff House has had problems with money, and as for Talcott, it wouldn't be strange for him to be driven into a corner and get involved in illegal acts in order to fill in the hole that he couldn't fill with his marriage proposal.

"I see it that way. However, there isn't enough information."

"Aren't these things at the Adventurer's Guild?"

Sheila shook her head.

"I was turned down. I know that the Adventurer's Guild wants Snakebite's information to stay hidden, and it would be troublesome for me if I was seen as suspicious and received a magic trial."

"Why is that?"

Sheila closed her eyes. I got the impression that she didn't know what to say next.

She finally opened her eyes and clearly responded.

"I'm a member of the Thieves Guild."

"Well...Will it be troublesome if this was revealed at the magic trial?"

She nodded after I asked this.

Even if the information, which was confidential, could be disclosed to her, there was no way she could receive a magic trial, huh?

One shouldn't kill, even if they steal. One should practice their skills day after day.

There were detailed rules for such things. Although she appeared to be a chivalrous thief, by no means was she a righteous ally. Their higher-ups might be similar to generous yakuza.

I rather hated thieves. I understood that there was a difference between Thieves or Scouts compared to Bandits, Brigands, and Burglars...that's what they were intended to do, though.

Surely there were underlings of the Thieves Guild working amongst the Adventurers as Scouts.

They also absolutely could not inform law enforcement personnel about these things.

Although I knew this because of the Game's knowledge, there was no reason for me to know the law, since I was an outsider. That was why there was a need to choose what words to ask Sheila again.

Rather, it could be said that Sheila was shouldering a reasonable risk by talking with me.

"Are you referring to talking about this to the higher-ups of the Thieves Guild?"

With the information I had obtained from BFO's quests...surely there were people who were officially members of the Thieves Guild but secretly worked as slave merchants.

I thought that there was a connection to this, even now.

If I were to say what they would do if one got kidnapped...They would probably first cast slave magic, which would disguise them as a criminal slave, and then sell them off. This was certainly an action that would cause conflict with the Thieves Guild.

Slaves were roughly separated into two types.

The first would become slaves through debt, as if they were apprentices, and were known as debt slaves. It was possible to buy yourself back with the money you saved up, and you would become free.

On the other hand, people who fell into slavery because they committed serious crimes, would be branded with slave magic and would never be able to become free.

This slave magic could bind the speech and behavior of those it was cast on. In other words, if someone was kidnapped and disguised as a criminal slave... victims would find it difficult to profess their own innocence.

Even if one were across the sea, it would be better to just sell themselves off.

"There are people amongst the higher-ups who disguise themselves and work as slave merchants. I don't know whether it's okay to trust them or not, and even though I truly don't know if Snakebite is involved, I can't just talk about mere speculation. I need to find some basis."

In short, the information about the Black Dimension Stone wasn't being leaked, huh?

Perhaps she didn't have confidence in the incident of the person's unknown whereabouts and Snakebite, whose methods weren't known.

They had a working army that was supported by the Cardiff House, so she tried to search for the whereabouts of her friend, who took evidence from them, by conducting a follow-up investigation on these guys?

"I see...I've understood your story; we might be able to help each other out."

"Then..."

"This and that are separate matters. It's an issue of trust between me and the Adventurer's Guild. I can't leak the information to you."

Sheila knitted her brows and dropped her shoulders. Discouragement was written all over her face.

"However, there isn't a problem if I go to the Adventurer's Guild and request investigation backup or an informant's report. It's better this way."

She opened her eyes widely and lifted up her head at my words. It looked like this was really effective.

If I could clean up Cardiff's mess with this, then I wouldn't say anything more. There was trust with the Adventurer's Guild because of my fortunate relationship with Beline.

As to whether the Cardiff House was truly involved in this incident, perhaps it would be easier to investigate if I went to the Guild.

--

Chapter 31

G5: Just giving a reminder that this novel is in fact complete at 715 Chapters + Epilogue so it's a long road. The author is still posting daily side stories so it's not completely finished yet. Enjoy~

--

Chapter 31 – Rescue

According to Sheila's information, Snakebite would be captured before long. The Adventurer's Guild had conducted investigations in the buildings near the port, but it seemed that they had unfortunately ended in failure. Contact from Snakebite had been severed, huh? They feared the information would be leaked at a magic trial. Perhaps the suspects had fled their base.

However, it appeared that the suspicious point Sheila mentioned, which was that members of the Cardiff House frequented the places Snakebite also frequented, had already been grasped by others.

I decided to go inspect that place before heading off to the Adventurer's Guild. Having to share information to the extent that I would have to cooperate with the Adventurer's Guild was out of the question.

The place we headed to next, under Sheila's guidance, was a building in the Southern District surrounded by high walls. I decided to observe the building from a street a short distance away.

"Is it that building?"

"Yes. However, we won't be able to enter with a guard hanging around the entrance."

"If we watch this guard...can we secure evidence to show a connection with the Cardiff House?"

"As long as I watch them, the guards who are active inside won't change personnel. Members of the Cardiff House also won't appear later. It looks like they aren't bringing in daily necessities either..."

I see...So it really was the Black Dimension Stone. The enemy might be summoners or opponents with similar skills and knowledge. They appeared to be quite skillful. They had even considered the matter that the Adventurer's Guild hadn't come to an understanding of the Black Dimension Stone's existence until now.

One was able to move inside the town without being seen if they utilized transfer magic, and they could bring in necessities and switch the personnel inside of the building.

Although I couldn't imagine that they would be so thorough...perhaps they were exercising a certain amount of caution, since Snakebite was captured.

"Well, understood."

Caduceus separated from my shadow, slipped into an alley, climbed up a wall, and entered the site. I decided to link my vision with it now. In order to sync my senses with it, it was necessary to consume some Mana.

"Now...?"

"Did something happen?"

"...No."

Sheila's face turned doubtful.

...Her senses were quite sharp. She somehow sensed that Caduceus had moved. I wanted to conceal my cards since I didn't know if I could trust her, so I concealed the presence of Caduceus for now.

I let it infiltrate and investigate the building like this.

I should run this by the Adventurer's Guild. There was also the option of talking to Rossetta about it, or even letting Prince Albert take measures.

Sheila looked back multiple times as we left. It seemed she was quite reluctant to leave.

Well, it was possible that her friend was being held captive in that building. If this were to end in failure in any way, even if we spoke with the Adventurer's Guild, I didn't know whether they could take immediate action. If the opponents could use transfer magic, there was also the possibility of them fleeing again. It was more than having a magic trial. It was like denying the information that was directly connected to the perp. They probably took precautionary measures

to the extent of having multiple bases, and I couldn't say for sure where their next base would be.

//

"What happened to Snakebite's case?"

We headed to the Adventurer's Guild, and I brought up the subject after greeting the receptionist, Heather. Sheila waited without accompanying me.

"...Isn't it better to not involve yourself too much in this case?"

"Well, I understand that you're concerned, but I'd be grateful."

Perhaps they didn't want rumours about guys hunting people of the same profession to spread to novice Adventurers.

"We've obtained information about the building that Snakebite's partners frequented. If we kept quiet about it, it would be a dishonor."

"...Really?"

"Yes."

I decided to conceal the matter of the Cardiff House for now. It wouldn't be strange even if I talked about the dispute I had with the Cardiff House, and even if I had other intentions by talking about such a thing, it would be troublesome.

"Understood. This isn't something in my jurisdiction, so please follow me inside to talk."

I looked at Sheila, who was observing me while pretending to look at a request form, and then headed into a room inside the Guild.

"I'll go call someone who is of a higher rank than me, so please speak with them."

"Understood."

While waiting for Heather's superior, I sat in a chair and concentrated on giving instructions to Caduceus. Even if it couldn't run away after it was detected, it had other countermeasures it could use. After I had focused my attention on the 'Opposite Side' for a while, there was a knock on the door from Heather, and an old man with white hair and a white beard entered.

“Oswald-sama, he is Theodore Gartner. Theodore-kun, this person is the Vice-Head, Oswald Coppard-sama.”

Oswald Coppard. Another amazing figure appeared.
He was an NPC in BFO, and he was famous enough to be in books.
Currently the Vice-Head of Termuilles's Adventurers' Guild, he was someone who held the nickname 'Holy Sword' when he was on active duty.

“It's a pleasure to meet you. I am Theodore Gartner.”

“Hrm. I'm Oswald. Well, make yourself comfortable.”

I sat face-to-face with Oswald.
Heather seemed to be quite nervous though.

“Have you heard the information regarding Snakebite's case?”

“Yes. I thought that I would not involve myself with that case too deeply, though. According to the information I obtained about Snakebite, it appeared that the investigation ended in failure. Before we talk about the topic at hand, I have something I want to ask.”

“What is it?”

“Are there people who have purchased Red Dimension Stones? Have you investigated it from that approach?”

The Black Dimension Stone was probably a product of the Red Dimension Stone, and if I was trying to think of a way to kidnap people for ransom or a way to make a profit, then gathering Red Dimension Stones was necessary. Basically, there were people from the Adventurer's Guild who purchased these.

Oswald guessed what I wanted to say, then he closed his eyes and nodded.

“We have. It seems that there were people who requested several groups of Adventurers to purchase Red Dimension Stones...and whether or not they have been vigilant, they have been disappearing after the Snakebite investigation ended in failure.”

...I see. As one would expect, the Cardiff House had not come to make those purchases directly, huh? The guys who have been giving instructions probably knew the situation, to a certain extent. The Cardiff House might be directly

involved in this.

"Here is my information then. The building is in the Southern District, and –"

I told him the location of the building. The corners of Oswald's lips rose and he asked me a question.

"I also have something I want to ask. How did you obtain this information? Who did you get it from?"

Well, I had not spoken of the circumstances to him. It couldn't be helped for him to ask this.

"I'm unable to answer that."

"Hou. Why?"

"It's to protect the person who provided me with the information. Please sympathize with their background. He is a friend of a victim of this case."

(TL: Theo uses "he" to protect Sheila.)

"...Is it the Thieves Guild?"

"I can't say. He, who had a promise with the Adventurer's Guild, brought me this information, but didn't hand it over for free. Other than this, not revealing his origins is the same as me protecting the promise of being bound to secrecy with the Guild, so I think that there is a line where I should protect him."

As for my role, it should be that of a mediator.

"...You're pretty eloquent. Haven't you thought that I might request for you to do a magic trial?"

"I don't really care for it specifically, but I don't think you have much spare time, do you?"

At any rate, the source of the information and such had become inconsequential and would be left unsettled.

"What do you mean by that?"

"For me, I think that the highest priority is to find everyone who has been captured and rescue them, rather than figuring out how the evidence was found. It's mandatory to reveal the evidence we gather, so it's better to take our time

with that."

I put my hand on my left eye and examined the situation on Caduceus's side. Right now, it was entering a keyhole and opening the lock. What came into view was a prison where the victims, who were held captive, were now escaping. Although the prison guards sensed an abnormality and placed their hands on the swords on their waist, they fell to the ground with their hands and feet skewered by Caduceus, which had solidified itself, so that they would neither die nor be able to run away.

There weren't that many personnel inside the facility, so I decided to taunt them a bit and crush them. They, too, would become witnesses.

I basically let Caduceus run rampant inside the facility, destroying its equipment and allowing the captive victims to escape. It was like the destruction was proof of their escape. Clever imitations were impossible. Sheila informed me of this area, and I think it was our win when we discovered the victims after Caduceus infiltrated it. Perhaps some material evidence or verbal evidence that would implicate the Cardiff House would show up amongst the proof that was left behind by the perpetrators. If that happened, Ashely and I wouldn't be occupied by hassles caused by Morris.

"I've tried to investigate the inside of that facility and already discovered the victims. Right now, I'm letting my familiar run rampant to help the victims escape. It's necessary to prepare personnel who can cancel Slave Magic."

Immediately after hearing my words, Oswald stood and said to Heather.

"Send anyone capable to that place immediately. Please wait briefly before rushing in. If they can detect clear abnormalities, don't let them limit themselves. Let them support the escape. Priests of the Moon Shrine have Slave Magic Release Spells. Hurry up with the arrangements."

"Y-Yes!"

Heather rushed out of the room.

Oswald smiled and sat down on the chair with a 'Doka'.

"This should be quite interesting. Did you intend to not talk about your familiar if you were unable to find the victims?"

"Well...that is the case. Also, if Oswald-sama hadn't appeared, I would have held back on talking about my familiar, and I would have only helped out with the escape of the victims. I heard stories of Oswald-sama's when I was younger, after all."

Oswald had climbed up with his own efforts and, compared to the current me, he was a rather open-minded person who wasn't short of 'excessive episodes'. Oswald's shoulders trembled as he laughed at my answer.

--

Chapter 31.5

G5: PLEASE BE SURE TO READ THIS BEFORE READING CHAPTER 32.

Xant: Interlude #2

--

Chapter 31.5 – Summoner of the Cardiff House

“Ah, damn it!”

Morris suddenly lost his temper and threw the glass that he had in his hands against the wall.

He wouldn't get drunk no matter how much he drank. Staying sober felt like an impasse, and even if he was drunk, he still got depressed. He would do nothing but indulge himself in a love affair later on.

Thus, he turned to alcohol and women. He was like that regardless of day or night. Still, it was by accident that he remembered something unpleasant.

Even though he was on the right track with a new business, it was so sudden. He was suddenly unable to do things the way he wanted to on just about everything.

It had been captured by Adventurers after all. He became confused and ended up vacating the Port Base. He couldn't take actions into his own hands, so he couldn't deal with or dispose of the Adventurers and female monsters that had been captured from the Labyrinth.

That wasn't the only thing. A problem occurred on that very same day, even though he made his second son, who was under house arrest until it became a suitable time for the storm to blow over, go to school.

His opponent was the illegitimate child of the Gartner House. He should also turn against that head of the Shirn House, who interfered with him, and see her as an enemy. Though, she might've been an enemy from the beginning.

Count Gartner and Baron Shirn. There was a large granary within their

territory. Speaking of insulting the head of the Shirn Family, it is probably foolish of him to do so, since he himself failed at farming. Although he intended to get his revenge, he had to withdraw first. Morris's mood was pretty much the worst due to such matters.

A person now looked at such a Morris with cold eyes and sneered at him.

"Please calm yourself, Your Excellency."

A voice like a ringing bell could be heard from Morris's bed. It came from a beautiful woman with red eyes.

Lynette Caird. She was a magician who came to the Cardiff Family around three years ago, by chance. Lynette was seeking an employer, and Morris accepted her.

"Do you think this could calm me down!? The stock we had in the Southern District was still up in the air so we couldn't move! Wasn't that your proposal in the first place!?"

"Ara, the one who partook in my suggestion is Your Excellency, you know? Your Excellency, earning a large sum of money comes with a small investment and some risk, and I'm making good progress in my research since I can do practical tests on it. In fact, if you look at it from the beginning, wasn't it fun?"

"It mustn't be such a situation!"

After he yelled out, Morris, who seemed gloomy, shook off Lynette, who rotated her hand on her shoulder, and left the bedroom.

Stomping footsteps vanished into the inside of the hall.

"...Fu. Too late."

Lynette, who was the only person left in the room, smiled. Her smile was like a thin moon, splitting apart to the ears.

"The pig is frightened."

Although it was certain that Morris's thoughts tended to move in a simple-minded manner, since he only believed in his strength, if one were to speak about that belief, then it should be something similar to Lynette's companions. Controlling Morris's actions was rather easy.

In regards to the Cardiff House possessing a storehouse within Boundary City, it was quite convenient.

That place was like having free access to the supply of materials of a research facility, and she could research whatever with a lack of thought and the sense of duty of a boss who didn't know what their future profits would turn out to be. She was bored with the persistent nights, but she thought it was an ideal symbiotic relationship.

However, it was the first time Morris had gotten upset at his failure to manage his territory. The Cardiff House finances had reached a limit, and even their own research was delayed.

In regards to a solution for that, they were informed that they could earn an average slave dealer's profits if they raised and sold female Monsters, along with captured Adventurers, from the Labyrinth.

They also said that the possibility of being discovered was low if he had their own Black Dimension Stones, or if he acted discreetly. Although this was something he agreed on, they did explain that it carried a risk, so, in his opinion, he thought there were not any lies mixed in.

Morris was attracted to this, and even if he, as a Count, couldn't take command, he put everything together, from his own plan to as far as the prison.

Unless he truly had repaid his debt long ago, he likely would have moved out of his mansion and been caught at the Port alongside the servants of the Cardiff House after Snakebite was arrested. Perhaps avoiding that situation was his own achievement.

However, all of this was to arrive at the seal of the Moonlight Shrine in the lower level of the Boundary Labyrinth, a place that was not meant for the likes of humans.

The Cardiff House didn't even have any right to boast about it, as Lynette's goal wasn't to attain status and lead a life of luxury. She was already in the same boat as that pig since she knew about what they've researched due to her currying favour with Morris.

Nevertheless, Lynette reflected on this.

Exactly what will happen? How far were the Royal Family or the Adventurer's Guild willing to go to find incredulity in the events related to the Count?

Maybe she couldn't afford to get upset about such a thing, no matter the circumstances, but to give out the results of her research until now, as well as the Dimension Stones and the like, while in the middle of her experiments was suspicious.

The research she had done until now was sent to her companions in full detail, and there had been reports given. It wasn't wasteful, but suspicious things were indeed suspicious. Research on Dimension Stones couldn't be done unless one was at Termuilles, but the Cardiff House ended up doing it anyways.

"This might be an opportunity."

It would take just a little bit longer until the results of her next experiment. She would need to complete it quickly if she was to escape...but it would still be difficult even if she fled. The research into Transference, the transfer of objects by utilizing Dimension Stones, was still incomplete.

There was a limitation to Transfer and Summoning Magic in this city, and whether it was inside or outside of the Labyrinth, there were barriers separated into many floors.

Due to the results of the research, it became possible to Transfer and Summon from inside those barriers...but one had to pass through the 'moving' main gate of those barriers in order to escape. If it became a situation where one was waiting for it to move to them, it was possible to be captured just before they could escape.

Would one be able to escape via Transfer if one destroyed the outside barriers as they killed the priests and priestesses of the Moon Shrine?

The trump card she had was still in the basement of this mansion, but she had to consider that there was a possibility of turmoil.

Although the risk was high, it wouldn't be that of a 'shameful return', but rather that of a 'triumphant return' if the barrier destruction was to succeed. She was certain that there wasn't a need to have her huge Walross make an appearance.

She had to consider whether to proceed onwards or to delay it.

As she thought about such things, she heard an angry voice from His Excellency, as if there was an argument happening.

Lynette left the room to find out what it was, and after peering into the entrance

hall from the 2nd floor, she saw that Morris was in a dispute with armed soldiers at the door.

"You bastards! Who was it that found out about me!?"

"But, Count Morris, you're under suspicion of being a kidnapper and a killer. Please behave yourself and accompany us."

"Do you think I would know about such a thing!?"

"If you think you can clear yourself of that suspicion, then—"

"Shut up! My Cardiff House is a distinguished family!"

Was what was said during this bickering.

Lynette thought that this wouldn't end.

How was this situation discovered? It was too late to not care about it, but if she really wasn't given freedom, then perhaps she would separate herself from the count quickly, before the turmoil started, and escaped the town. Right now, she wouldn't have any choice but to give up on her research along the way.

Although Lynette had counted such chickens before they hatched, Morris had destroyed everything thus far.

"You insolent people! I'm telling you to shut up!"

The enraged Morris cast a water spell, Icicle Lance.

The ice spear struck the soldier's shoulder, who let out a scream and fell on the floor while his blood splattered.

Lynette inadvertently leaned forward at Morris' action. This situation wouldn't take a turn for the better since Morris had resisted. The way he dealt with this was an especially bad move on his part. It was more accurate to say that it was the worst move he could take.

If one were to speak of what these soldiers, who came to the mansion of the Cardiff House, were unhappy about, then perhaps it was about Morris acting recklessly, similar to a boss rushing towards success.

They had arranged a plan to deal with him by cooperating with the Adventurer's Guild, and whether they held the achievement of the hostage's rescue or that they had overlooked the criminals of the Cardiff House until now, by encountering this impatience of his, only those who were on the side of the

authorities would steal a march on him.

Although his opponents were known to be part of a martial arts sect, it wasn't necessarily the end for his private army that was always in his mansion. He also neglected such a thing.

"H-He can use Magic! Backup! Call for backup!"

"You're greatly outnumbered, so resistance is futile, Count Morris! Will you be a man and acknowledge our suspicions!?"

The soldiers were still saying such things. They were being cautious, since their opponent was the head of a Noble family. It was so disastrous that even Lynette wanted to close her eyes.

Morris shook his head in annoyance and yelled out at every soldier that made a fuss about this as they brandished their spears.

"Shut up! Do you think I would fucking know about such a thing! All of it was her! That damn woman! Everything was decided by Lynette!"

-That damn pig! Is he selling me out!?

An accomplice, what was he saying?

Lynette became enraged while she gripped the handrail in the hallway. It was final. She was given protection by her boss, but she had no intentions of accepting such an excuse. Morris ruined her, and the person who was most important to her became a wanted man. It was at that instant.

Perhaps she was really unlucky. She could already see the frequented main gate being forced shut in order to prevent the fugitive from fleeing. However...

"Kufufufu."

After a momentary fury passed through her body, a laugh escaped from her mouth.

You're really foolish.

A wanted man? You sold me out? We Demons are incompatible with you humans in the first place.

Besides what happened, there wasn't a need to act so shrewdly anymore,

pretending to be a powerless human.

Miasma rose from Lynette's body. This was the only time she would use THAT that was in the basement.

A magic circle expanded around her feet.

"Rise."

//

"W-What the hell is it!?"

A large vibration shook Morris's mansion. Something that was long and narrow pierced the floor of the entrance hall and suddenly appeared. It wasn't just one or two.

"A H-Hydra...!? But this is..!?"

Some of the soldiers recognized it.

It was like an ugly dragon, a dragon with several heads that could take pride of its abnormal regenerative ability.

However.

Pieces of flesh were scraping off and falling here and there, and the muscle and white bone under that stuck out.

A zombie. It was a zombie Hydra.

"Hii!?"

The soldiers that were near it were eaten. Those who were being eaten swung their weapons, but they only struck the floor and got chewed up.

At the same time, its decaying structure began to regenerate. It was the flesh and blood of the pitiful soldiers. They were assimilated and absorbed into the immortal Hydra.

This scene was too frightening; a shiver ran through the soldiers. When a Hydra changed into an undead, in exchange for losing its original regenerative ability, it gained the ability to regenerate limitlessly by eating its 'spoils'. They were monsters that had obtained such an ability. They didn't have a sense of pain or a sense of fear, so they might be more dangerous compared to original Hydras.

However, it was impossible for it to be something from nature. An undead was an existence only meant to serve. If that was the case, then its owner was sure to be around here somewhere.

“Lynette! Is that you!?”

Morris yelled out, searching for her, and then he saw her.

Lynette was floating inside the entrance hall.

Morris, who had already forgotten blurting out her name, had expected for this to happen. He knew the existence of this immortal Hydra after all.

She would use this to escape the city. This is what Lynette had taken into consideration.

Therefore, she should save him too. He had thought as much, until he saw her appearance, that is.

What stood there wasn’t the beautiful woman Morris knew well. Lynette’s face had remained, but she had eyes that shone with a blazing red hue and purple skin, along with a black mist rising off of her whole body.

“A D...Demon?”

With their power that preyed on human negativity, they were inhabitants of darkness who should be feared.

“You’ve some free time on your hands.”

A clear, female voice that he knew well could be heard from that grotesque figure.

“Your disgusting emotions are really quite delicious you know. You’ve allowed me to enjoy it from the moment I started working here. However, there is an end for everything.”

Lynette finished speaking for a moment, and then she took in a deep breath. A snake-like tongue that extended from ear to ear appeared from her mouth.

“Gobah!”

At that moment, a dense, compressed miasma bullet shot out from Lynette’s mouth, piercing Morris’s stomach.

“Ah, So-, huh...?”

“Go die already, you piece of trash! A human of your standing shouldn’t betray me! Gyahahaha!”

Morris held the hole in his stomach, and collapsed onto his knees. Lynette didn’t dare end his life. The dying Morris’s agony and despair was irresistibly delicious to her after all.

“You monster!”

A fireball fell down onto Lynette. However, it was shot down with a miasma bullet, and Lynette closed in on the soldiers who could use Magic. She extended her sharp claws at the soldier’s hands and feet and cut them.

“Guoh!?”

After she grabbed onto the hair of the soldiers who had fallen onto the ground, she threw them towards the Hydra as if she were throwing dolls. The hands and feet of the soldiers were chewed off in the air, and they fell unconscious.

“Guahhhh!”

“Well, now hold on a second. There’s still more you know?”

Lynette looked like she was enjoying herself, and then she gave the soldiers a smile, who had several heads, hands, and feet chewed off.

“S-Sto—”

“Eat them.”

“Gii-!?”

The screams of the soldiers sounded like a chorus to her, and then Lynette spread out both of her hands towards the remaining soldiers.

“Here we go.”

She glared at the soldiers who backed away after she stuck out her tongue and licked her lips.

//

“Ah—so delectable. Now what will those shrine priests taste like?”

Lynette rode on the back of the immortal Hydra and advanced without hiding her true character. It had been a while since she revealed her true character and had a taste of this despair. It was really an irresistible flavor.

If this flavor was compared to the guys who were captured from the Labyrinth, then the anxiety and fear she had tasted in the prison was more mild. Her target was the entrance to the Labyrinth, the Moon Shrine. Oh, how delicious would the despair and agony of those priests and priestesses be.

“Hii! Hiih!”

“Save me! Save me!”

There were soldiers who resisted, but some also ran away. Those who caught her eye were offered to the Hydra, and then Lynette proceeded onward, feeding off their fear while listening to their screams. Although there were sporadic counterattacks, it wasn’t anything special. All humans were like healing medicine to the immortal Hydra.

Let’s go. What a joke.

Even if she shot directly towards Boundary City, she needed to make some preparations, and she would do a sudden attack from within.

The Hydra’s giant body came to a plaza near the shrine and trampled it. Then, HE came.

“W-Who?”

She suddenly got chills. Following her instincts, she jumped out from behind the immortal Hydra.

It happened in the blink of an eye. Lightning pierced the immortal Hydra’s back, which was enough to dye the world in white.

“O-Ooooooh!?”

However, a giant magic circle expanded in the plaza, as if indicating this tremendous lightning attack was only a warm-up.

Lynette saw a young boy in the middle of it. He had reddish-brown hair and eye, and appeared to be a noble.

This young boy also saw her and squinted his eyes, as if he hadn’t seen anything important.

She intuitively knew that the lightning attack from earlier was from him.

"That guy—!"

A hole opened up on its body from that lightning attack, and white smoke rose. The immortal Hydra could still move.

Lynette, who felt a chill from the young boy's expression, tried to incite the Hydra.

However.

"You're in the way."

The young boy stepped forth with an explosive speed.

"Bite him to death."

He approached the Hydra until he was close enough to touch it, and then he held his hands out. A Sealing Circle expanded out from under the immortal Hydra's feet with the young boy's words.

When its body was completely immobilized, an atrocity occurred inside the Sealing Circle, one that should be feared.

Munch. Munch.

The sound of chewing resounded.

Lurking darkness expanded beneath the Hydra. Countless eyes and mouths appeared from inside it.

The darkness launched tentacles, which bound the immortal Hydra's body repeatedly and then locked it down.

This giant body was preyed upon and chewed at by the darkness.

The victims that became its flesh and blood began to regenerate the Hydra. This resistance tried to repel the darkness that was chewing at it.

However, it was pointless. As if it were sinking easily into the Abyss, the Hydra was simply being devoured.

It was Rank 8 Darkness Magic, Eater of Demons. It was an Advanced Spell. However, this was a scene that even Lynette couldn't watch. She couldn't look away from the young boy who was directing a tremendous amount of hatred towards her.

This feeling of negativity coming from him should have been something that Demons liked, however...

She could only see hatred. What he directed at her was something she was used

to.

For what reason was there delight? She had found the ‘spoils’ that she had been looking for.

It was the feeling of a carnivorous beast targeting a herbivore.

“A Demon, huh?”

A quiet voice could be heard coming from the young boy who was staring fixedly at Lynette.

-- --

Chapter 32

--

Chapter 32 – Demons

Was it because I had cast Advanced Magic barehanded using my Circulation? Although a small amount of blood dripped from my left hand, it didn't seem to be serious.

There was something more important than that though.

I looked up at the Demon that was floating in the air and staring at me. It appeared that she, who had been rampaging as she wished, was quite displeased.

She did look displeased, but I should remain calm and kill her. Morris had almost lost himself with rage when I spoke with him after all.

Although my opponent was a Demon like my Mom's enemy, this one wasn't Mom's enemy.

That was because Mom cured the King of Death from an epidemic five years ago.

"...Stop laughing, you bitch. It looks like you take pride in using powerful magic."

The female Demon floating in the sky had been looking at me viciously, but she also seemed quite happy.

"You didn't think you could win against this Demon-Sama who can use powerful Magic, right? You're indeed a brat."

As the Demon remained floating in the air, the black mist that was coming out from her body surrounded her, as if she were playing with the mist. I knew what she wanted to say. For her to be floating freely in the air meant that she had a powerful advantage. In response to this, the Magic humans could use to fly was Levitation.

However, although it was Magic that could suspend one's body, it was notorious

for being ill suited for battle. It wasn't something that could be compared to a Demon's Flight Magic.

No matter how many powerful spells you had, it would be meaningless if they couldn't hit the target. The moment someone activated an Advanced Spell and such was rather scary, since you could be easily discovered. Such was the case here.

If someone was to ask me about intermediate Magic and below, then the miasma, which was cloaking the body of this Demon, would become a problem. The true explanation behind this issue was something that should be called 'Negative Magic'.

It caused the decay of normal Magic, and it would eat into the body of living things if one were to come into contact with it.

The sturdiness of her fleshly body and her physical abilities weren't comparable to a normal human. She wouldn't be swayed with a single hit.

But what was she trying to do?

"I know about Demons even without asking you. Let's begin now."

I wielded my Magic Staff after she spoke, and after her eyebrows furrowed for a moment, she opened her mouth and bared her fangs.

"You're just a brat that isn't supposed to know how to talk. I'll squeeze the life out of you for as long as you live and stuff it into my mouth."

She flew widely to the right as if signaling with her words. The stone pavement she had been standing on before only lasted a moment before it was destroyed. What she had cast at me was a miasma bullet.

Miasma caused Magic to decay, so it held the specialty of being 'absurdly strong' when one used it in a shootout against normal Magic.

Sure enough, she maintained her distance from me and fired off bullets. They flew to the right and to the left, so I rolled on the ground. I avoided the miasma bullets that came at me incessantly. Perhaps she was known as a Magician Killer. I countered it with Fireballs that seemed to weave through the gaps between the bullets, but she didn't try to avoid them. She went up in flames with a direct hit, but I didn't believe that she would be defeated with just that. Magic flames lacked the transmission of heat, but they would blind her. I immediately rushed

forth and closed the gap.

A smiling Demon could be seen under the blast wave.

"Your terrible magic has no effect on me! Go crawl on the ground, you trashy insect!"

The Demon scattered bullets from her left hand in the shape of a fan. Any of these could conceal a power destructive enough to kill a human. On top of that, it was a Variable Shot. Even if they shot at me in order, the speed of each of the bullets was different. They were all timed to impact the ground simultaneously.

I activated Levitation and rose up into the sky. Maybe because she was confident in her victory, the edge of her lips distorted. A ball of miasma formed in her right hand.

If she were to follow through and use it—the miasma changed into a long blade and chopped through the area I was at. It was flawless, perfect. The speed she used wasn't something that could be avoided with Levitation.

"Goh!?"

However, I wasn't there. There was a change in the air as I concealed myself. The Demon lost sight of me as she followed through with creating that giant blade.

I thrust my knee, which had a concentration of Mana that was enhanced by my Circulation, into the side of her head.

The nature of Mana Circulation compared to normal Mana was different. As a result of mixing one's Mana with one's Life Energy, it would not decay from a Demon's miasma, nor would the miasma be able to eat into my body.

"W-What!?"

The Demon was taken by surprise and tried to get away from me, but I kicked the air and stayed on her heels. I eluded the miasma bullet that was fired from her left hand by using a Magic Shield behind me and closed in on her without a moment's delay. It was my chance.

She was shocked and her eyes were wide open, but she extended her claws towards me and I drew my Magic Staff to receive it.

"He's freaking using the air as his footing!? What the hell is he going to do!?"

To begin with, I never said that I couldn't battle in midair. I expanded a Magic Circle under my feet and behind me. With a little bit of control, I cast Magic Shield and Air Blast, which were two beginner Spells. By combining these with the Levitation that suspended my body, I was able to get some sort of propulsion by using Shield as my footing and Air Blast as a booster.

Those who could exhibit this type of free mobility in the air were high-rank BFO players, giving them the ability of carrying out three-dimensional aerial combat. Instead of modifying techniques that players had developed, BFO was amazing enough to prepare additional items and martial arts to make this possible for those who weren't Magicians, but after seeing the Demon's reaction, it seemed like there weren't any humans who were capable of doing this.

"Unbelievable! A mere human is controlling three spells at the same time!?"

As if three or four spells of the lower-tier would make her say 'What the hell?' She brandished her claws.

I received the slash that was trying to take my life with my Staff. Her sharp claws immediately went by the side of my face, as if they were going to slice my head open. I thrust my Staff into her claws, causing them to go past me. I swung the back of my Staff down. I still had a very small chance. It ended up grazing the Demon's side, who barely dodged it. I wasn't going to let her break away from me. I would overcome her like this.

Swing, sweep, defend, flow, thrust. Clashing with someone allowed me to deflect them like this.

The one thing that was unacceptable was probably my laughing during this moment of struggling for one's life.

I couldn't help being happy. My hands right now had the power to fight a Demon directly, like this.

However, this wasn't enough. It wasn't enough at all. My strength, my speed, and my Staves. More, more, I needed more power!

Screeching noises resounded every time her claws and my magic staff collided with each other.

We crossed each other and clashed in midair many times, as if we had become

intertwined.

Although my Staff wasn't really that great–

“Gahah!”

Perhaps she didn't feel the need to improve herself because she was of a high ranking species. Her close combat technique was weak. She moved to the right, and then to the left. As I dodged the claws that tried to defend against me, I struck the Demon's head with the front end of my Staff. Then she was sent flying far away after being hit in the solar plexus with one attack from my Staff, which was fully loaded with Mana.

She was different from me, so she couldn't support her body in midair with Flight Magic.

Although she broke up into pieces with one attack by an ‘ant’, it wasn't a decisive blow.

As I thought, a Demon's endurance was astounding.

However, it was within my expectations. I wouldn't give her the time to recover. I immediately kicked the air and chased after her. I swooped down from above and, leaving it up to my Mana, I kicked her.

She slammed into the ground and rolled around.

However, I was confident. I had no interest in going easy on her, nor in giving her any mercy. As long as one had a Magician's sense, she could control the miasma as long as she was alive, similar to being able to make a technique. She wasn't an opponent who you could capture alive or squeeze information out of.

It appeared that the Staff had also reached its limits, so it would be the last time I would use it.

Magic Circles covered both ends of the Staff that was grasped in my hands.

“You monster–”

“It's the end for you guys, since you said that.”

Both of us were laughing.

“Dig.”

I focused on the center of my Staff, causing a wind vortex infused with my mana to appear. The pressure of a spiraling storm gathered at the tip of my

Staff.

This was a Rank 7 Spell, Vortex Lancer. I threw my Staff, infused with a tornado, towards the Demon.

It was accurate. I aimed for the center of the Demon's chest, and she was engulfed by it.

The storm exploded at some point and at the final moment, it cut down the entire place, as if it were a ring. What remained at the end was the Demon lying on the ground, in the center of the giant hole that had been created.

--

Chapter 33

--

Chapter 33 – Moonlight Shrine

By the way, everything there had crumbled into sand.

The Demon gave a wry smile at this sight and let out a sigh, laying down in the shape of a 大, as if she had given up. Speaking of the way these guys died, I knew of it, and it was something like this.

After I approached her with a Magic Circle floating above my palm, the Demon shook her head.

“There’s no need to stop. I don’t feel anymore pain.”

...She’s still capable of exchanging words with someone, huh? Though, I had no intention of making friends with a Demon.

If that were the case, what should I ask her?

Should it be about her purpose? If the expected Cardiff House Summoner was a Demon, then maybe she made the Black Dimension Stone. Perhaps that was a good reasoning?

What was its purpose?

.....

“–The Moonlight Shrine.”

The Demon stared at me in amazement after I said that. Although I didn’t have the time nor the method to interrogate her, I could at least observe her response after asking her a leading question. It didn’t really mean I was confident though. In regards to her reason for being here, whether it was to gain a profit from kidnapping people or to devour the victim’s feelings, both were rather understandable.

“Geez, you’re interesting. In fact, you’re a very interesting brat.”

Whether or not the Demon realized that I had tricked her into revealing

something, her shoulders slightly trembled.

"You, what's your name?"

"...Theodore."

"Is that so? Be proud, Demon Killer. My name is Lynette."

The Demon gave me a laugh, and then her whole body quickly turned into sand and was swept away by the wind.

...Guys like her were disastrous. There were people who considered that of all Demons though.

I shook my head for a bit, then switched up my thoughts. I had other things to consider after all.

The Moonlight Shrine.

It was an area in one of the lower levels of the Termuilles Labyrinth.

It wasn't even implemented in BFO, but the game gave hints to its existence.

For example, in the past, its seal was destroyed by Demons, and its treasure was taken away.

It wasn't certain though, since I didn't know when on the timeline it happened, and if the Demons' objective happened to be in Termuilles, then I thought it would be the Shrine.

If research had been conducted into the Dimension Stones in order to invade the Moonlight Shrine, then it wasn't like they wouldn't know the reason for Demons finding their way into Termuilles as well.

If that was the case, then did it mean that the Moonlight Shrine's seal had yet to be destroyed?

Perhaps this event would occur anytime between the start of the game's story right now and 10 years into the future.

Either way, this country, which includes Termuilles, was peaceful in the game. The area that was dangerous at the start of the story lied to the North. After all, large outbreaks of Monsters occurred there.

Although these were referred to as Grand Quests that were distributed along the way, if I were to yell about such a thing with a loud voice right now, then people would only think of me as delusional.

Magic Trials were pointless. Although you could see if someone was telling a lie

during one, it wouldn't work for those who seriously believed they were telling the truth.

These were labeled as Grand Quests, but BFO was a game where one could live as they pleased in a fantasy world.

It didn't necessarily mean that the main plot wouldn't progress no matter what, so a part of me had set it aside for later.

Although I didn't know which direction the outbreak of Monsters would spread to, which could be all the way to the South, it wouldn't be a loss if I preserved my strength. I had no problems fighting opponents from the Labyrinth.

...Well, perhaps the treasure that was taken away had to do with the large outbreak of Monsters...?

That might be plausible. Speaking of Demons who let Monsters run rampant, the game's plot was composed such that it was easy to understand, so stray Demons that appeared in the game were also called rogue Demons.

If one were to consider what they were doing, then they might be Demons who had orderly plans with some type of goal.

I couldn't say that those were tied to the situation at hand because I might be thinking carelessly...Presently, there was the existence of Prince Albert and Holy Sword Oswald as well.

Anyhow, about the Moonlight Shrine...Maybe it was because I heard about it from the Demon, but should I put it up for discussion?

Even if I was to say that the things the Demon said were nonsense, and even if they didn't like it, she was probably aiming for the Moonlight Shrine. The information I wouldn't be privy to later on would probably be examined by the higher ups as they pleased.

"Theodore-sama!"

The guys who had fled from the plaza all at once had gathered. Whether or not they came due to the commotion, Grace and Ashley pushed their way through the crowd and looked at me.

"Oh, it's you two."

"They said a D-Demon appeared...!"

“No way, did you defeat that Demon by yourself?”

The two of them looked worried. As for me, I thought it was better for the Demon to not come across the three of us when we were together. Morris's matter hadn't been tidied up yet, so we had been on alert since yesterday.

The day had ended after releasing the victims from their base, and bringing us to today.

Since we had arranged a meeting for an explanation, I had visited the Adventurer's Guild by myself.

It appeared that the arrangements on the officials' side had gone wrong and they had ended up making trouble for themselves.

From there, the Hydra and the Demon had appeared after they breaking out of the Count's residence.

Although the members of the Adventurer's Guild helped out with the city's evacuation, I, who was free at that time, took the opportunity to go on the offense. If I was to summarize and explain the situation, it would be something along those lines.

“Yeah, I'm fine.”

“Theodore-sama, blood is...”

Oh, was it from the backlash of using Advanced Magic? Although the bleeding from my left hand had stopped, now that I thought about it, I told them that there was a dull pain.

Ashley took my hand and cast Healing Magic on it.

“Thanks, Ashley. Grace, over here.”

I said my thanks to Ashley, and then I applied a seal on Grace. Grace's cheeks flushed red, she appeared absent-minded. I wondered if her vampiric impulses would show up because of the smell of my blood. It could turn into something bad.

“Theodore, I owe you one. I'll be sure to give you my thanks sometime.”

When I turned towards the voice, I saw Sheila amongst the crowd, and then she vanished from the area.

For her to reach a conclusion on this with a smile...her friend was probably safe. The victims of the kidnapping incident were fine. This problem was really piling up.

The treatment of the female Monsters that had been captured hadn't been decided yet, and I had more things on my mind, like the matters concerning how Morris would be handled and how the position of Talcott, who was under the care of the Prince, would be affected.

Personally, I had acted violently without any hesitation under the public eye, so it looked like things were going to become noisy for a while.

Hmm...crushing Demons was fine and all, but being sought after was troublesome.

I wonder if I should descend the Labyrinth first thing in the morning for a while starting tomorrow. Let's also ask Rossetta about having Ashley come into the Labyrinth as well.

Although it was likely that this country would continue to be peaceful for a while...there probably wouldn't be any loss in having Ashley become stronger quickly.

//

After telling the officials a dramatized version of the exchange I had with the Demon, and that she had targeted the Moonlight Shrine, we resolved the necessary matters and returned home.

Now, after that, Grace, who appeared apologetic, was in the master bedroom, her shoulders squared and head hanging, while wearing her night clothes.

"...I'm sorry for the trouble, you two."

"It's f-fine, Grace-sama."

Ashley appeared to be a little embarrassed.

...What should I do in this situation?

"I didn't think it was much of a problem though. Would drinking my blood cause you to get drunk to a certain extent?"

"Yes...I feel that it has a very nice smell."

...Perhaps this had to do with her mentality.

Even though it had become night, the reactions of Grace, who had ended up getting drunk off of the smell of my blood, had yet to disappear.

It took quite a bit of •• effort you know.

(TN: I'm sure you can figure out what •• is censoring :P)

Due to that, Grace, who was fine with us being together even when we slept today, complained. It seemed like she was saying that, as long as I was on equal terms with both her and Ashley, then...so Ashley was also with us. It was fine as long as the relationship between the two of them was good.

It appears that they have been worried ever since I fought with the Demon.

But...Umm. To sum it up, I would be sleeping between the two of them in the shape of a JII.

Something like that.

It couldn't be helped, no matter how long we looked at each other, so the two of them finally lied down, with me in the center of the bed.

"Theo..."

Grace, who muttered that, touched my cheek with her slender hand and smiled at me in satisfaction. It was somewhat ticklish.

"Umm, Theodore-sama..."

"Go ahead, it's fine."

"–Yes."

Ashley also placed her hand around my shoulder in a shy manner.

When I looked to my right and to my left, there were two strikingly beautiful women.

The two of them soon became quiet and began to fall asleep...
...I can't sleep. Pull yourself together, me!

--

Chapter 34

--

Chapter 34 – Ashley’s First Battle

“Sleep Cloud!”

After Ashley casted her Magic chantlessly, smoke bloomed from her hand. The group of the Goblins that appeared from the back of the passage lost their consciousness and fell down on their knees.

Grace dashed at them, and, leaving it to her strength, sent them flying with a kick. The Goblins were lodged into the wall like gumballs and couldn’t move. Although a Magic Arrow, specifically a beginner spell called Magic Bolt, flew out from the back of the passageway, it was blocked by my Magic Shield. I countered by striking them with lightning.

The Robe-wearing Goblin Shaman let out a short scream before it collapsed. Hmm. Well, it seems that there are no troubles with combat.

The spell Ashley used was Sleep Cloud, a spell that released sleeping gas. Although it was a low-tier spell, it was rated just below the respected Healing Magic.

Normally, it was a spell that wasn’t taught, since it could be easily abused, but it appeared that Rossetta wasn’t worried about that. Was she also taking the people involved with Ashley and her status in society into consideration?

“When did you learn Chantless Magic?”

Continuing along, when we descended into the Labyrinth with Ashley, I set up battles for her so that I could determine which parts of combat she excelled at. Just as I was trying to ask her what she was capable of doing, she used Sleep Cloud, and her casting this as her first move... meant she considered this to be combat, though I was a little surprised that she could already use Chantless Magic.

"I had heard that Theodore-sama might be going down into the Labyrinth. I was in a hurry, so in order to use several convenient spells chantlessly, I spent my free time training all sorts of Magic. I have also learned the ropes of Chantless Magic due to Life Magic."

...Or more precisely, Rosetta understood why she said she was 'Fine'.

"Aren't you scared, Ashley-sama?"

"I'm fine. Besides, being a Lord who can use Magic, I can't pass up these types of things. When push comes to shove, I'm using Brave Wind so I don't get frightened."

The beginner Spell, Brave Wind. It was said to be a spell that mustered up one's courage. Maybe it was Rosetta's suggestion, but it seemed that she expected actual combat.

Grace and I had to make sure not to spill too much blood as we defeated enemies, and because Grace was in her Released State, I made Caduceus be cautious of our surroundings so that Ashley wouldn't get attacked.

"Besides, I feel reassured since the two of you are with me."

I couldn't feel any danger from Ashley's expression and her tone of voice. Her heart might be stronger now, compared to the impression I felt at the beginning. The problem with her body could also be resolved if she was a user of Healing Magic.

I should prepare some Red Dimension Stones just in case...let's continue on like this.

Well then, the area we were at right now was the 12th floor of the Labyrinth. It was better to wait here until the situation on the outside calmed down. I felt like we should gather information while being shut-ins to avoid these troubling things.

The 12th floor...was a floor where Monsters like Goblin Shamans, who could use Magic, and Huge Spiders, which wove webs and waited for their prey, would appear.

There was still some doubt as to whether Leveling here was actually still good, but I thought it would be a handy floor to get used to subjugating Monsters while taking measures to ensure our safety.

“An enemy.”

What appeared were five Wood Puppets. The groups of previously encountered Monsters were gradually increasing in number.

“Light Bind!”

I had gathered those guys together under my control after confirming that there were no other enemies around. This time, Ashley went out in front and brandished a Long Mace.

She had also become used to short distance combat, so I decided to let her experience close combat up front, since I had gotten the Wood Puppets under my control. It wouldn’t cause any trauma to her, no matter how she defeated the enemy, if it was a Wood Puppet.

“Hah!”

The Mace equipped in Ashley’s hands splendidly struck the head of a Wood Puppet.

Although it was difficult to say if her Long Mace had gotten used to the activation of Magic...it was quite the fine mace. She seemed to have applied the ‘Weight Reduction’ and ‘Accelerate’ enchantments to it.

While Weight Reduction improved her handling of the Mace, it also increased its power whenever it made an impact by releasing it. Even if it was Ashley, who had not gotten used to muscle strength, it brought out power that made it easier to use.

Anyways, I closed to a comfortable distance. As for the cards I had prepared for a Magician’s close combat, I had gotten some ready so that I wouldn’t lose. However, for her weapon choice to be a Mace, it seemed that she was influenced by Grace and me. It was possible that she felt some sort of responsibility.

Grace was as usual. She cut up a Wood Puppet into round slices with her axe. For her, cutting these Wood Puppets up was similar to chopping firewood. She subjugated the remaining Wood Puppets by swinging her axe left and right, while Ashley defeated them one at a time.

“Well done.”

“It’s all thanks to Ashley-sama.”

The two of them looked at each other and smiled. Even though we were exploring the Labyrinth, it was quite calm. Well, the enemies here were weak, after all.

I quickly finished stripping them of their materials with my hands, and we eventually saw a door to the side after proceeding along the passageway. I opened the door, and after observing the situation, I noticed a wooden chest lying in the center of the room.

Well well, it was getting more enjoyable than the searching and stripping this time around.

Treasure chests respawned after the new moon passed. Although nothing major appeared in the chests on floors of this level, right now we were leveling up Ashley, so I thought I should share basic information about exploring with the two of them, stick to the basics, and continue along carefully.

Although treasure chests appeared in both small and large rooms...there was a need to pay attention when you enter the room if there weren’t any Monsters in it.

It appeared there weren’t any traps in this room nor on the treasure chest.

There was a Low Grade Healing Potion in the chest.

It was definitely reassuring to have them on hand, since Potions could heal simple external wounds, but carrying a lot of them would become a burden. Whether you planned to hold or transfer them, they were items worth worrying about, since their selling price was quite good.

“Although there aren’t any around here, there will be traps at the entrance, on treasure chests, and similar places down on the lower floors, so if we go there, please be careful.”

“Ok.”

“Understood.”

The two of them nodded.

“Well, I can remove them.”

“Is it fine for us to learn it as well?”

"Nah. It's better if I do it."

There were many ways to learn how to identify the types of traps and how to disarm them, but it wasn't something that could be done overnight. To have them learn while getting injured at the actual site of the trap...they didn't really need to do that. Besides, it was better if Ashley didn't touch them at all. A party needed to flee as fast as possible if the party's Healer got injured. It wouldn't be a problem if I got injured, since Ashley's healing power was high.

After searching the small room for a long time, we found the stairs that continued downward into the 13th floor. We had yet to gather Dimension Stones though. Perhaps we should immediately move on here.

"Cutter Mantises appear from the 13th floor onwards."

They were giant mantises with sharp sickles. Their sickles, which were taken during the stripping process, could have magic stones extracted from them, and the sickles could be made into tools due to their sturdiness. We proceeded downwards, and after searching for a while, a different type of door appeared on the side of the passageway.

"What's that door? Its design is different from the ones we've seen before."

"It's a large room. You'll understand them better in the lower floors. There is a large number of Monsters waiting in the middle of it, so please be careful."

"I see...What should we do?"

"Naturally, we should rush into it. Watch and have this become your future reference on how one should handle a Monster Room if you see one."

Although they didn't understand Levels or the value of EXP...clearing Monster Rooms would let one increase their combat strength.

"...Shall we go then? Try not to go in too deep after you enter the room, Ashley. I'm letting Caduceus protect you, so you'll be able to keep calm if you chant a spell."

"Understood."

Ashley nodded, and then the clear sound of chanting resounded through the Labyrinth.

“Round Guardian!”

A ball of light revolved around Grace and me.

It was a type of Defense Magic, a Rank 4 Light Magic Spell.

It revolved around its target, which let it become a shield against attack from behind or from your blind spot, and out of the Magic that Ashley could currently use, this was probably the highest grade spell.

Once the spell was completed, I opened the door and rushed into the room with Grace.

Sure enough, it was a Monster Room. It was composed of spiders and mantises. It appeared that there were ants as well, but...I didn't really like Insect Monsters. Spiders aren't insects though.

“Blizzard!”

It was a Rank 6 Intermediate Spell that combined water and wind magic. A cold vortex raged inside the room, and the movements of the Monsters visibly worsened.

I left my back to Grace and Ashley's Defense Magic and jumped towards one of the nearby mantises.

I spun my staff like a windmill and cut off both of the mantis's arms at the joints before striking its head. It got caught in the rotation of my Magic Staff and flew up into the air as it came apart.

“Air Bullet.”

Although a Huge Spider spun its thread at me, it was pushed back by my wind Magic.

The large spider got covered in its own thread and became unable to walk. Spiders choose non-sticky silk as their footing so that they won't get caught in their own web. In other words, if I pushed a sticky thread back at it and it got covered, then it would end up like this. I struck it with an Icicle Lance, finishing it off, and then struck at the next enemy.

While evading their scythes, I got up close with one of them. After activating my Circulation, I released a High Kick. When I unleashed the Mana infused kick at the mantis, it was blown away vertically. I then severed its body in half as it fell down.

I looked at the two of them.

What I saw was a mantis that had its scythes destroyed by Grace.

Grace drew their attention by tossing the axe and catching it in her hand over and over, before swinging at the Monsters with ludicrously fast speed, tearing them apart.

As for Ashley, she seemed to be focused on chanting.

Although it was natural for her to be defenseless, the mantis that approached her carelessly got its feet skewered by Caduceus. It was just like the thread of the spider that got blown away. Caduceus precisely blocked it. Its defense was perfect.

Perhaps there weren't any opponents who could overcome us on these floors.

"Aqua Jail!"

It was a Rank 3 Water Spell that made one suffocate in a closed water cage. Of course, this effect was plenty against these insects. There were even Cutter Mantises enclosed in the water cube.

Those two didn't appear to have any problems. Let's focus here then.

"Thunder Cloud!"

The Rank 6 Thunder Magic caused dark clouds enveloped by purple lightning to expand outwards.

Although this Spell didn't have the speed of a lightning bullet, you would be electrocuted if you touched that cloud. There wasn't enough space to run away in this compact Monster Room. I gathered the Monsters in my view together, and they were charred black.

//

It didn't take too much time to annihilate them.

Cutter Mantises and Huge Spiders. There were around 30 of them in total, perhaps?

The material extraction area for spiders was its abdomen.

Although we freely fought with them, there were a lot of them that could still be stripped for materials. Even if they were too damaged, it wouldn't be useless, since we could gather them together and cast Extract Magic. It was troublesome to fight while being concerned about that.

Although the reward per individual spider wasn't that great...it appeared that I could expect a decent harvest with these numbers.

-- --

Chapter 35

--

Chapter 35 – Cardiff’s Full Account

The difference between the 13th and the 14th floor wasn’t that great, but there were clear changes to the structure of the Labyrinth as you descended downwards.

Until now, the Labyrinth had been made of stone, but here it changed into rock and dirt, which suggested that there were natural caves around, as well as having a raised ceiling. There were stalactites on the ceiling. Wild moss was shining dimly on the wall, and you would be able to see even if there wasn’t any light.

Sounds of water could be heard. There was a trace of moisture in the air too.

“It really has changed completely from the previous floors.”

Ashley appeared to admire this somehow.

“Hmm...Changes to this extent are still understandable, you know.”

Water that had reached the ground was flowing down the pathway. The water was rather clear.

You could even drink it if you purified it with Life Magic.

The dirty water that flowed toward the Corrupt Lake from the sewers, which was changed by the Labyrinth, branched off at an earlier floor.

I think this water originally came from an underground spring. As to whether it was changed by the Labyrinth, in BFO, they were simply called Cave Areas.

“By the way, whenever the scenery changes like this, the Monsters will change as well. Shall we wrap this up and search for a stele on this floor? We’ve gathered plenty of Dimension Stones.”

“Understood.”

The two of them nodded. This was Ashley’s first Labyrinth Exploration, so it

was better to not attempt the impossible. If Grace wanted to get the feel of the Cave Area for a bit, then it would be better to go back once and make suitable preparations before clearing the Labyrinth again.

As for this Cave Area, although you could see some distance away, thanks to the luminous moss, there was more to it than what met the eye. The structure was more of a mess when compared to earlier floors. Enemies lurked in the shadows of rocky areas, where the water deepened, and in the darkness of the ceiling, so it was easy to be taken by surprise. It was better to cast night vision, instead of relying on light sources, and proceed from there.

“There are Monsters around, so please be careful of the shadows.”

As soon as I said that, a large bat attacked us from the darkness above. They were giant blood-sucking bats called Blood Bats.

“Silence Field!”

I muted our surroundings with Wind Magic. Since they searched their surrounding by relying on ultrasonic waves via echolocation, having to rely on their degenerated eyes meant not being able to see anything. Grace struck it down with the flat of her axe, as if she were returning the shuttlecock back to her opponent in badminton, and Ashley countered with a beginner Water Spell, Water Cutter.

Besides Healing Magic, it seemed that Ashley was quite versed in Water Magic. Perhaps her affinity with it was because of her lineage? The bat wings were stripped and became our loot. This would become a material used in compounding; it really felt like having a witch brew something in her cauldron.

After we proceeded through the cave, some Slimes that were sticking together appeared in between the caves. Although we could see them since we had night vision, with the amount of light that came off the luminous moss, there would be lots of things we couldn't see even if we had a torch or a lantern. When we went directly under them intentionally, they dropped down in a free fall, coming to attack us.

I countered them with a Fireball while dodging their attacks, and in the blink of an eye, they got whipped up. As if their whole bodies were seething, they shrunk, just like that, and Magic Stones rolled around.

That was too quick. It was hard to attack them with physical attacks because they were liquid Monsters, so it was quite troublesome.

“What should we do if Slimes get stuck onto people who can’t use Magic?”

“It’s fine if you swing them around with all your power and break them into pieces, so long as it’s the Slimes around these areas.”

Grace answered Ashley’s question.

If they were torn into pieces, their will to fight large opponents like humans would surely fade away. It would simply cause them to lose their fighting spirit and leave.

Although higher rank Slimes in the lower floors were dangerous, the Slimes around here weren’t anything special. If I were to mention a strong Slime, then it would be Caduceus.

“There are even enemies in that puddle, you know.”

Is what Grace said. A large frog, called a King Frog, rushed forth from the nearby puddle.

Although she struck its tongue, which had a bump on its tip, by swinging her axe around like a whip, if she had thrown the axe, the frog’s tongue would have ended up getting crushed.

The harvested part of a King Frog was its tongue, but its whole body could be used as food, so it was fine to bring it back whole.

Maybe it was better to transfer it with the Dimension Stone, since we had time to spare.

Ashley was using Round Guardian, so I could say that she wouldn’t receive any surprise attacks, but if that were to happen, this Cave Area would become a little troublesome. There was a need to be cautious from up above us to down at our feet as we proceeded, without any exceptions.

It would be perfectly fine if I divided up the roles. This time, I was being cautious for things above us, and I was letting Grace watch out for things below us.

Large Rooms were the same as Small Rooms on the higher floors.

I opened the door while checking out the room, which had a tree with rocks scattered on it inside.

What came into view was a natural cave. As I thought, it was part of this large Labyrinth.

Depending on the phase of the moon, the structures and terrain of pathways changed.

A fine, complete set of equipment that covered one's hands and wrist came out of a treasure chest.

I felt some type of Mana after holding up my hand, but the details were unknown. I should return to the Guild later and let them appraise it.

Whether I could use it or sell it depended on its abilities, but for this type of equipment to appear on a floor like this meant my luck was quite good.

"Who would provide us with such a thing? Monsters?"

"This large Labyrinth is a wonder in itself, you know."

Grace and Ashley's doubts were reasonable. I didn't have a real answer to that.

"It's said that things flow into the lower levels of the Labyrinth from a spirit world. I wonder if there is something that combines these types of items and sends them into the depths of the Labyrinth."

As for an image, it was something like the Boundary Labyrinth's control system.

//

We returned to the Shrine using a Dimension Stone from the 15th floor's stele. We headed to the Adventurer's Guild immediately and converted the loot we extracted into money.

After we went to the appraiser, we learned that the equipment was a pair of Gauntlets.

This received a bit of attention, but I ignored the surrounding gazes.

"It appears you've gathered quite a bit. Did you take on a Monster Room?"

I nodded when the receptionist, Heather, asked that.

“I wanted to experience whether or not the Monster Rooms on the earlier floors are troublesome.”

“...You know, it really isn’t surprising, since it’s Theodore-san’s group.”

Heather raised her brows a bit, and really poked her nose into it. It appeared that she was amazed.

“Besides that, has Heather-san heard of the matters regarding the Cardiff House?”

I should have a chat with her and gather some information. It was important to grasp the situation.

“It seems they’ve found the corpse of Count Morris. Umm...I’d like to refrain from talking about the details.”

“Oh, so you know about the Count.”

I had heard about Morris being killed by a Demon from Rossetta. The guys who fought the Demon at Cardiff’s residence appeared to be in a terrible state.

Morris seemed to have been murdered on the spot, because he couldn’t be rescued after he was shot by a miasma bullet...and he seemed to have suffered until his death. He was probably a companion, and whether or not he offended the Demon somehow, they should understand that type of guy.

“It wasn’t just the Head, there are rumors that even his first and second sons were involved, you know.”

“Oh...”

Heather’s expression clouded.

“Although the second son wasn’t brought in for a Magic Trial, it appears that the first son somehow knew about it.”

I had thought that they would tell him right after it happened. Since this involved the Black Dimension Stone, it seemed various information was relayed to the Adventurer’s Guild as well.

“Is that so? Then what about the Count’s family?”

"It's proper to strip them of their peerage and confiscate their territory."

Right? The heir knowing about this and remaining silent was equal to betraying their Kingdom.

The eldest son would be arrested if that happened, and even though the second son was innocent regarding the kidnapping incident and being involved with the Demon, he would be next in line to get disowned, and right now he was restoring his reputation. It seemed that the Cardiff House was ruined and had been brought to an end.

Perhaps...the sole winner here was the Royal Family, since they got to reclaim the Cardiff's territory?

Morris failed at managing his territory, and making a recovery was probably hard to do.

It was difficult to see whether this would cause the Royal Family to have a debt to pay or if it would increase their power.

"What's going to happen to the second son?"

"It seems the family is going to disown him. Right now, he is in the custody of the Royal Family, and besides them saying that they are looking after him, it appears they've said they believe he's innocent, too. Thanks to that, even the main wife, who is related to the second son, is also being looked after."

Prince Albert could have easily dodged further questioning by turning it into an inspiring story.

It would have been even harder to give further punishment to Talcott if he was innocent.

There was also some value to ending it without having to reveal one's cards.

Even if the Royal Family found Talcott to be innocent, he would want to show his generosity to those who were inside and outside of his circle, as well as to Nobles.

Prince Albert and Talcott probably shared interests.

However, I never said that Talcott's position would worsen any further than what it was right now. There might've been various things that were said in the shadows, but at the very least, to have him criticized face-to-face would have made it increasingly difficult for Prince Albert to devise some sort of plan.

Although he was the 4th Prince, whose foundation of power was weak, royalty

was still royalty.

Since Prince Albert hadn't made any changes to the plan of taking in Talcott, there probably wouldn't be any problems for the time being. Talcott himself might experience reasonable hardships, and in regards to his circumstances and feelings, I felt that something was wrong.

-- --

Chapter 36

--

Chapter 36 – Monsters and the Labyrinth

“Hey, Theo-kun, Grace-san.”

“Oh, if it isn’t everyone.”

Every member of Forest Bird showed up at the Adventurer’s Guild while I was speaking with Heather.

“I heard that you fought a Demon this time, right?”

“Even though I understand that they’re strong...I can’t believe you’re a Demon Killer at such an age. Are you going to be a Dragon Killer next?”

“Well...leaving Dragons aside, the Demon happened to be there, so I let fate take its course.”

Rather than letting fate take its course...If anyone noticed, she didn’t like me and collided with me when she started to go on a rampage. I didn’t give details about this since it would cause Grace to worry if I told her directly. I didn’t really harbor any hatred for Dragons either. As a matter of course, even if we talked about it assuming I could defeat them, it would be troublesome.

“Ashley-sama is with you as well. Could it be that you went to the Labyrinth together?”

Guessing from their reactions, it appeared they knew that Ashley came to Termuilles and even that she had conflicts with the Cardiff House. The Adventurer’s Guild was a place to gather information after all. They were acquainted with Forest Bird, and if rumors of the Snakebite incident had spread, it would be normal for them to have heard about it, too.

“While thinking about a future where I would be able to use Healing Magic, I was considering whether or not it was better to accumulate some practical

experience."

"Hah, all of you are capable."

Lucian gave a flat response in admiration.

"All of you from Forest Bird, how far into the Labyrinth have you all gotten?"

They laughed and answered Grace's question.

"We're aiming for the Old Mine Path to gather gems and minerals. We arrived at the 9th floor...but it's troublesome, since it's a wide area. We'll be entering the Labyrinth soon."

"So we're below you, and you're above us, huh?"

The route to the Old Mine Path in the Labyrinth was quite ordinary. There weren't any devious traps, and Forest Bird would probably get through it easily.

"How far below have you gone?"

"15th floor."

"So quick!"

Well, it wasn't something that would make them stumble over in shock.

"Oh yeah, Theodore-san, I'd like to continue our previous conversation. There were Monsters amongst the group of people who were kidnapped by the Count, right?"

Heather inquired about that, so I nodded.

"Yeah, there were some. Right now, the Adventurer's Guild is in charge of them, right?"

Depending on their species, Monsters might not necessarily oppose humans and could come to an understanding with us. The Cardiff House's plan didn't just involve the Adventurer's Guild; they also wanted to kidnap certain types of Monsters to sell as slaves.

I didn't know whether those Monsters came from inside the Labyrinth or from another place though. It seemed they had a way to summon them.

Obviously, the victims of kidnapping would be released. Even I was interested in seeing how those Monsters would be handled.

Since the monsters had enough intelligence to be able to come to an understanding with humans, depending on the circumstances, the Adventurer's Guild would have to be careful with how they handled the Monsters, since the tribes who had been friendly with humans until now could end up opposing them.

"That's right. The victims appeared to have been encouraged while they were being held captive. They pleaded to everyone, 'I want to go save them'. Although they were in a somewhat weakened state, waiting to be healed, they were wary of the Guild, so we wanted to deal with them politely and as soon as possible."

"Hmm."

"There's this as well. Now that they've calmed down, it seems they want to speak with Theodore-san."

"Again...why is that?"

"Theodore-san is the benefactor who released those girls, right? They wanted to express their gratitude."

...Hmm. Monsters wanted to speak with me, right...

"Understood. It doesn't matter if it's just talking with them."

"I'll go tell them then."

I, too, had an interest in Monster ecology, especially the Monsters who 'suddenly appear' in the Labyrinth. Things like where and how they were born, and what they think about as they live.

It seemed the thoughts and behavior of Monsters outside the Labyrinth were different too.

In the natural world, there was no way that Cutter Mantises and Huge Spiders would be friendly with each other in the same area once someone invaded it. Perhaps the two of them were put together because they liked to prey on each other.

It was impossible for different races to cooperate, be friendly with each other, and oppose Adventurers.

As for the Monsters in the Labyrinth, almost all races co-exist with each other without conflict. Fighting with Adventurers who entered the Labyrinth wasn't

just to satisfy their appetite, it also appeared that their primary goal was to obstruct Adventurers who invaded the depths of the Labyrinth.

Including such things, I've thought about asking about the circumstances of Monsters who originate from the Labyrinth.

In regards to the similarities between Monsters, strong Monsters liked to build their nests in areas where Mana gathered naturally. It was written in books that the Mana was stored in parts of the Magic Stone inside their body, which was then converted into Life Energy. Well then, what should I ask about?

//

I received a subjugation reward from the Adventurer's Guild. It seemed that the reward money they gave me detailed the completion of the kidnapping incident and the Demon subjugation.

In regards to the Gauntlets that came out of the treasure chest, I decided to keep them since they were equipped with a Strength Enhance enchantment. Ashley was equipped with a mace, so I thought this would provide her with some assistance.

We separated from Forest Bird and Heather, and when we returned home after doing some shopping at the Market, I found Rossetta and Sheila staring at each other while maintaining their distance in front of my residence, as if they were restraining each other.

Rossetta, along with her usual smile, seemed to be evaluating Sheila, and although Sheila's expressionless eyes appeared tired, she was observing Rossetta coldly nevertheless.

“...What are you guys doing?”

“Ara, Theodore-kun. Welcome back.”

“Theodore, I came to give my thanks.”

“You did?”

“Umm, she said her name was Sheila. I think...she was a key figure in resolving the kidnapping incident.”

“Oh, are you the person I talked to and worked with yesterday?”

"That's right."

I was now talking about the incident and summarizing it to Grace and Ashley. Sheila said she was part of the Thieves Guild, but she didn't really give any details.

"I don't understand it very well, but there's no need to worry, right? She was hanging around your house, so she wanted to ask you about it, right?"

"I'm with you, too."

...It seemed that Rossetta and Sheila had tried to talk to me with the same purpose in mind.

I was sure Rossetta understood. Sheila was causing a stir, waiting to talk about her own situation, so maybe...she was worried?

"Well, what are you guys doing standing around and chatting? How about the two of you come inside? At least let me serve you some tea."

I brought everyone to the drawing room and decided we should talk there while drinking tea. Even I had things I wanted to talk about with Sheila. However...the number of women...around me...was rather high.

//

"Hmm, it looks like it went quite smoothly in the Labyrinth today."

"Yes, the two of them helped out."

It seemed Rossetta had come to teach Ashley Magic. She was giving some one-on-one guidance in a corner of the drawing room.

It was fine to have her teach Support Magic, but I felt that Rossetta and Ashley had already entered a master and pupil relationship.

Rossetta had yet to meet with Talcott again...and she was quite happy after asking Heather to talk about it. While we were at it, perhaps I could ask Rossetta for further news about the Prince, who had not gone to the Adventurer's Guild, and Talcott.

"Oh, Sheila-san. I can give the reward money to Sheila-san too, regarding the resolution of the kidnapping incident. I can provide some consultation if there is a need to discuss the amount. Would 50% be fine if we are unable to reach an

agreement?"

Sheila inclined her head after we said those things while drinking the tea Grace made.

"I believe the incident this time was resolved thanks to you guys. I can't receive any additional money from you."

Sheila...as I thought, she did seem to know about Caduceus. Perhaps she heard about it from her captured friend, but if she was gathering information about it, then it would lead her to me.

"Compared to my achievements regarding the kidnapping incident, Sheila-san has more, right? I expect to receive the reward money for the Demon subjugation, so it's fine."

(TN: they don't know yet that he's received the money)

As for me, the incident was resolved with the information that I obtained from her, and I received the reward money thanks to tidying up the problems that happened around me.

To not give Sheila any profit...probably meant that she wasn't professional in her ethics.

Whether or not she understood the things I wanted to say, Sheila's expression didn't really change...Well, maybe she was always like this.

--

Chapter 37

--

Chapter 37 – Sheila’s Friend

“Half of the reward money...If Theodore...had my information, I think anyone would have been able to save everyone like that.”

Sheila looked at me and surprisingly said such a thing.

“I don’t think others could move the same way I did. It’s true that I’m grateful to you.”

“...Understood.”

Sheila gave me a small smile. Then that smile disappeared and she spoke with a serious expression.

“If it’s fine with you...I want you to get along with my friend. That child is at the Adventurer’s Guild.”

“Oh...In other words, they are...”

“...Irmhild is a Lamia. We grew up together in the Western District.”

Speaking of the Western District...that area is probably the Slums.

“A Lamia, huh? Are you worried about her situation now that she’s being taken care of by the Adventurer’s Guild? You were even hesitant to talk about that earlier.”

“I didn’t know whether Theodore would save her if he heard she was a Lamia. I can’t be too indebted. I truly considered taking her from the Adventurer’s Guild, but I decided to not make things worse, since the Guild doesn’t appear to have handled her with violence.”

“...I see.”

If there was violence, it might get mistaken as a Demon disturbance, and the

two parties would clash.

Lamias were Monsters that had the upper body of a human and the lower body of a serpent. They could either be friendly to humans or oppose them, and although it was different for each individual, there were even stories of them falling in love with humans, since they could take on a human form.

Within the Adventurer's Guild, there were plenty of people who had experience in saving Monsters that didn't oppose them.

Even if one removed risks, such as opposing tribes which could be handled without any obstacles, friendly Demons were unexpectedly important.

After that was...hmm. I had heard of stories of Adventurers who wished for love with female Monsters. Those types of Adventurers were really idiotic.

Due to that, I felt that...Sheila was worried that I would act coldly towards her friend?

There weren't any Lamias, from the information I had seen with Caduceus. All I saw were Sirens and Harpies. Irmhild might have taken the appearance of a human while she was captured.

"That child is certainly a Lamia. She doesn't attack humans. Rabbits, birds, and the like are plenty for her."

...I see. I understood the things Sheila wanted to say. Even if she was a stranger, it was impossible to reject her thoughtlessly. Although it was convincingly impossible to understand someone who didn't really know me, perhaps there were people who weren't like that. The suspicious actions of Sheila, who was trying to not harm her friend, were completely understandable.

Lamias, who consumed blood as nourishment, were hated since they were regarded in the same light as vampires. The difference between them and vampires was that lamias didn't have the lethality and the contagiousness of vampires. Their coexistence with humans, who saw them as beasts at best, wouldn't be too difficult if they could understand each other.

"I understand that. Well, I do not think there is a need for Sheila-san to worry."

There was no way I could be hateful towards her for a reason like her bloodsucking. That went without saying.

"I'm a dhampir, after all."

With that, Sheila blinked after Grace gave her a smile. She closed her eyes and nodded.

"I see. With this, I won't worry about it anymore. I believe in Theodore."

"...I have something I want to ask of Sheila-san. Where in Boundary City does this person come from?"

"She said she couldn't go back ever since she headed out of the Labyrinth...a long time ago."

Hmm. Perhaps this was saying Irmhild was fine, if one were to ask about the stories of the Monsters in the Labyrinth.

"She couldn't go back, you say?"

"She also said it reached the point where Labyrinth Monsters attacked her, and she could no longer go inside."

Hmm. Perhaps one would be recognized as an alien if one headed out from the Labyrinth even once?

I realized that it was quite understandable if one were to consider that, even if one used a Red Dimension Stone, the items brought out from the Labyrinth wouldn't be lost once they were brought back into the Labyrinth.

Besides that, Irmhild, huh? Maybe I could ask her some simple questions, if she had gotten used to human society. Although she might not be able to help if it was related to something from a long time ago, it would be better if I just asked about it.

"Although Irmhild-san will definitely speak with him once her condition improves, will Sheila-san come with us?"

"...Is that fine?"

"She's your friend, right? Isn't it hard to appear at the Adventurer's Guild by yourself?"

"...Thanks. I am grateful."

"I, too, have an interest in talking with a person who originated from the Labyrinth."

//

Rossetta and Sheila finally returned home and it was now the three of us. We ate dinner at the dining table, since it had already become evening. After we finished eating, we entered the bath and washed away the sweat and dirt.

The three of us were slowly passing the time while seated on the couch.

After going into the Labyrinth, there was still a need to get rid of Grace's impulses, even if it wasn't morning. It wasn't like the vampiric impulses would disappear if they were left as it was. The more she endured it, the worse it would become during her next "Thirst".

In other words, it was very important to continue this, for the same reason that I was doing Ashley's Mana Refinement.

During this time, I had come to use Mana Refinement on Ashley as well. However, this really wasn't the correct posture for Mana Refinement. I realized the amount of time that Ashley, along with Grace, stuck closely to me had recently been increasing day after day.

"I really love the warmth during the Mana Refinement."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

What was with today? I felt like Ashley was being assertive and taking advantage of this more than usual. Her posture was the same as Grace, placing her cheeks on my shoulders.

Well, as for Ashley, she experienced her first battle. The effects of her Brave Wind probably vanished but, was it because of that?

"Hmm, good work today."

After I said that, Ashley's cheeks blushed for a bit.

Well then... let's do that?

"I'm sorry. I'll be fine before long, even if I don't rely on Magic."

"Don't worry about it. Would it be fine for the three of us to sleep together today as well?"

She seemed to hesitate for a bit, but Ashley nodded deeply. It would get resolved peacefully if they could put up with me, and for today, perhaps I would

also overcome my sleepiness.

"It can't be helped, since it was Ashley-sama's first time inside the Labyrinth and in battle.

After experiencing something dangerous like going out on a hunt, even I have calmed down after having my head stroked by Theo."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Umm..."

Such things had happened. Speaking of Grace going out on a hunt, that happened for a while during Mom's passing. Even I was worried that time. Hmm. Still, for her to bring up this story now...

Grace had a gentle smile.

...Well, that's fine. I stroked Ashley's beautiful, silvery hair as I continued Mana Refinement.

"Hey, that tickles."

Ashley laughed and squirmed around. Grace squinted her eyes, as if she had seen something amusing.

Umm.

If these two were on equal terms with each other, then I should include Grace too. I placed my hands around their slender shoulders and threaded my fingers through their hair.

"N....."

Grace closed her eyes a bit and leaned against me.

Speaking of just coming out of the bath, I smelled her shampoo, which was made from the sap of the Savona Tree. Their hair, the feeling of touching them, and their smell was indeed amazing...but I didn't have the time to worry about this the more it happened.

Ashley dozed off after we continued on like this without really thinking about anything.

She was probably tired. I laid her down and let her sleep on my lap.

"How about we sleep like this... for today?"

"Well... I wonder. Waking up like this will be pitiful."

"I brought a blanket, you know."

Grace headed to the second floor after she stood up.

N...F-Father, M...Mother..."

Ashley, who was on top of my lap, talked in her sleep. I stroked her hair like I did previously.

... That's right.

Ashley's circumstances were similar to mine. I understood why Ashley went into the Labyrinth, fought with Monsters, and was being more assertive.

If one were to say that they knew they were strong, or that they could become stronger, then there was value in exerting oneself. Whenever one was worried about this, one could receive confidence by being together with someone like this.

"Thank you for waiting."

Grace covered Ashley's body with a blanket, then placed it over my shoulders. She sat next to me, and put on the same blanket.

"Well then, good night."

"Good night, Theo."

I turned off the magic light ball that floated near the ceiling and closed my eyes.

Although it was a bit too early to sleep, it was important to rest, since I had plans to head into the Labyrinth again tomorrow. I couldn't really sleep yesterday, so I immediately let my drowsiness take over.

--

Chapter 38

--

Chapter 38 – Why You Were Born and What You Will Live For

“...Morning, Grace.”

“Yes, good morning.”

“...G-Good morning.”

“Yeah, morning to you too, Ashley.”

Grace put on a smile after opening her eyes and looked at my face. Maybe she woke up due to our voices. Ashley herself noticed the posture she had slept in, and then sat up straight, looking at me in surprise.

“I’m sorry...”

I smiled wryly at Ashley, whose shoulders were drawn in.

“It’s fine. Did you sleep well?”

“...Yes.”

Caduceus, who had been assigned to watch outside, returned. Although the matters regarding the Cardiff House had been tidied up, there might have been some survivors. I intended to have Caduceus act as our night guard for a while.

“Caduceus’s matter will be entrusted to Theo. I’ll go make breakfast.”

“Grace-sama, allow me to help.”

Ashley followed Grace, and they hurried off to the kitchen. I could hear their voices; they seemed to enjoy deciding on what they would make for breakfast today. Grace too...I had come to notice that she had started to make a gentle expressions more often, compared to when we were at the Gartner residence.

//

“Morning, Theodore.”

“Yeah, morning.”

Just as we approached the square near the Guild in a carriage, we met up with Sheila. Exchanging morning greetings, I headed off to the guild accompanied by four people. Perhaps I would be able to speak with Irmhild if her condition had improved. After we left the carriage at the stable and entered the Guild, I found Heather, who was arranging documents, at the counter like always. Noticing me, we greeted each other, and she nodded slightly after I tried to ask about the issue regarding the Monsters.

“Understood. Please come this way. By the way, who is this?”

“Oh, I wonder what I should say. She’s currently being under consideration for becoming a party member.”

Well, whether she would be added as a party member or not, Sheila wouldn’t care about such a thing.

This wouldn’t be the last time we accompanied each other, so I decided to give a vague response that wouldn’t cause any issues, even if we were seen together in the future.

“I’m Sheila. It would be a pleasure to register as an Adventurer here.”

“Is that so? I’m called Heather. It will be a pleasure working with you, Sheila-san.”

Heather, who wasn’t really bothered by it, nodded and then guided us to a room within the Guild. According to her, this facility housed the injured. If at all possible, I didn’t want to be too indebted.

After approaching the room, singing could be heard coming from inside. ...Mana was spreading with that song. Although this could easily become a Cursed Song, depending on the singer and their musical intervals...somehow this was similar to a popular children’s song. Mixing the voices of a Harpy and a Siren...was really impossible.

The singing stopped after I knocked on the door. The girls all looked at me after I entered. The three should be the ones over there? The female Monsters had

been resting quietly on top of their beds. These were the people that Caduceus saw before.

All three of them seemed to have used a shape-shifting technique, and although they took on a form that was really close to human, the Harpy had feathers sticking out of her wings, and the Siren's ears looked like the fins of a fish.

With that, perhaps the one that couldn't be distinguished from a human at all was the Lamia, Irmhild.

"Umm, it's nice to meet you, I guess. I'm Theodore Gartner."

Surely, the ones who came were the girls that wanted to express their gratitude.

"Ooh, it's a child. It's a human child."

"Is he the human who saved us?"

"Well, well, thanks for being polite. I'm Irmhild."

After the Harpy and the Siren exchanged glances, they stared at me, and then Irmhild put on a smile and inclined her small head. Well...it was clear, judging from their reactions, that they had grown accustomed to human society. From head to toe, Irmhild looked at me fondly, she had quite the gentle air around her. If I had to describe her, it was like she wasn't a Monster, let alone a Lamia. The one who those two were teaching the children's song to was probably Irmhild.

"Fufu, I'll be the one to present our gratitude, Theodore-kun."

"No, I just happened to be there after all. Umm, these two are Grace and Ashley."

I introduced the two of them. It seemed the Harpy was called Dominique, and the Siren was called Eustia. The Harpy looked like a child with a freckled face, and the Siren was a beautiful woman with almond eyes and a mole beneath one eye.

...Sheila was a bit restless. It was like she was wandering without any particular location in mind.

"Wasn't Heather-san still in the middle of work? We're fine over here."

“Is that so? Well, there’s no need to be rash since it’s Theodore-san, so I’ll leave this place to you.”

Heather inclined her small head after saying that, and left the room. Unexpectedly, there seemed to be a lot of races that learned skills at the Thieves Guild and succeeded in life as Adventurers. Although I had a clear conscience, Sheila was self-conscious about it. Vice-Guild Master Oswald knew that those who provided information regarding the kidnapping incident were connected to the people around me. These people seemed to be a bit familiar with the members of the Thieves Guild.

That was why it was probably better for Sheila to avoid being seen acting friendly with people involved in the kidnapping incident in front of Guild members. Even if the Adventurer’s Guild thought it over, the Thieves Guild might be strict, and maintaining face was necessary.

“Irmhild, are you fine?”

“Yeah, the Guild brought in rabbits and sent them to us. Sheila-chan came in directly today.”

“Theodore helped me.”

Sheila and Irmhild seemed to be happy about each other’s safety, so for now I would hold off on talking with them and try speaking with Dominique and Eustia instead.

“Where were the two of you before you came here?”

“Even if I told you where, and whether I was summoned or not, humans wouldn’t know the land where I was born, and without knowing why, I was dragged out of there with Magic and put inside a prison.”

“Me too. I was suddenly caught by a Demon, you know.”

“So you were suddenly brought inside Boundary City from the place you were at?”

“That’s right.”

...Was this the outcome of Demon Lynette’s research? Although it turned out to be a Forced Summon from outside the city, surely there were various

restrictions on Summoning Magic within the city, since there were repercussions to it.

Generally, other than the summoning of Monsters who formed contracts with you, stray Monsters couldn't enter the city, and it would be strange for a Demon, who could already speak in the first place, to be inside of the city. The likely result was to first keep in mind the removal of the Demon, and then trapping them.

In other words, Lynette took advantage of the effect and entered. By now, whether it was the Shrine or the Palace, this was probably causing the higher ups to be at their wits' end.

If that was the case, then these girls' position might be unexpectedly safe. As for Sheila, this would probably be good news to her.

Although they were valuable witnesses that had interacted with the Demon, as long as the Monsters were friendly and cooperated with the Adventurer's Guild, there was no reason to treat them badly, going as far as to make people lose their positive impression of the Adventurers assigned here.

Whether or not they distrusted the humans who were capable of catching them, it seemed that these girls were aware that they had been caught by a Demon.

"Irmhild-san?"

"I'm a Monster born in the Labyrinth. I lived in Boundary City from the start."

Well...this was just like what I heard from Sheila.

"Can I ask about the time you lived inside the Labyrinth?"

"Hmm, talking about that is fine, but do you have an interest in such a thing?"

Irmhild put a finger on her lips and inclined her head.

"Yeah, I'm curious about what's similar and what's different between normal Monsters and those from the Labyrinth."

For example, the reason why I was here might be in Boundary City. The Labyrinth was rumoured to be connected to the spirit world. If that was so, then it wouldn't be strange for there to be a boundary between Earth and that spirit world.

I didn't give a shit about knowing the secrets behind my birth or my backstory

though.

As long as I was alive, I had to live on and think about what I would do until I died.

Knowing my backstory just wasn't for guys like me; rather, how many humans truly understood theirs?

Although Kagehisa had created various backstories for Theodore...like Mom fighting Demons, such information hadn't been established yet. My life belonged to me, and Mom's life belonged to her.

"...I too want to know that."

Irmhild wore a smile, but somehow she seemed troubled.

Didn't she say that she couldn't return to the Labyrinth, and that she had met with Snakebite, requesting them to produce a map?

Did she want to return to the place where she was born, or want to know why she was born?

"I vaguely remember that I was with everyone inside the Labyrinth. We created a place similar to a village inside the Labyrinth, and I lived there."

"A village, huh?"

No matter how I thought about it...it was an unfamiliar area. Perhaps it was a gathering area for friendly Monsters?

"I wonder if it's okay to say this. At that time, I saw a dream...all of us were sent into a passage and lived a life where we could make our own decisions."

Sent into a passage where they could make their own decisions, huh? I was under the impression that other hostile Monsters bore the roles of antagonist who eliminated foreigners that tried to invade the Labyrinth. I also felt like these girls' Village was akin to an NPC village.

"I was always comfortable and didn't feel hungry when I was in the Labyrinth. There wasn't anything to be anxious about."

"Then, why come outside?"

"I don't really remember...my past. But I was already outside by the time I realized it."

At that moment, as if the world had changed colors, I noticed it for the first time.
In exchange, I ended up being cast out from the Labyrinth."

...Perhaps it could be viewed as the Labyrinth putting them to work and
controlling them.

Irmhild, who gave such a monologue, didn't seem to be faking it.

-- --

Chapter 39

--

Chapter 39 – Invitation to the Palace

“However, even if they were taken away from there, the Monsters who leave the Labyrinth are completely different from everyone in the Village, you know.”

“So, that means?”

“Everyone realized that each of them had different personalities and had their own tastes. Rather than being Monsters in the Labyrinth...If I were to compare everyone in my memories with Monsters, they wouldn’t be similar at all. Even so, it would be strange to think about fighting, right?”

Hmm. So they didn’t “suddenly appear”, but were born in the Labyrinth instead.

Irmhild certainly said that everyone lived together.

“I don’t really understand, but were your parents there?”

“Yeah.”

Irmhild naturally nodded and then laughed, as if she was feeling nostalgic.

“We had rules in the village, such as not being allowed to head outside or to let anyone enter.”

To my knowledge, I had never met Monsters who were friendly with humans or showed friendly behaviour to them inside the Labyrinth.
Even if they were being controlled, due to leaving voluntarily, they were making a living?

Hmm. If I were to describe it in one word, then perhaps it would be...isolation, or sheltering? Then, who were they? Why were they doing it?

“Speaking of rules, who decided them?”

“Well, I didn’t think of questioning it too much. Now that I think about it, who

was it? I wonder about that myself.”

Irmhild placed a finger on her lips and tilted her head.

“Umm...”

“Irmhild is such a child.”

Sheila said.

...Speaking of not being under someone’s control...she might just have a carefree attitude.

“Well, anywho, I don’t think there is such a village on the earlier floors, right?”

“Is that so?”

“From what I gathered about the Labyrinth, I have never heard of a floor with a Monster Village. Even if I try to consider the Village’s situation or purpose, it seems like you’ve said that they don’t want to get invaded or the residents don’t want to head outside.”

“Hmm...until now, it was probably impossible to search for it.”

Irmhild let out a ‘Hou’ as she sighed.

At that moment, we heard a knock. Heather appeared.

“What’s wrong?”

“Someone came, and wants to meet and talk with Theodore-san.”

“Understood. I’ll head there immediately.”

“Eh? Oh, well, please...wait for a moment.”

Although Heather replied with that, she looked behind her and appeared to be keeping someone back.

“I’m very sorry. Like I said earlier, please wait in the lobby. He’s in the middle of a visit.”

“Well, I don’t really care. I’m in a hurry.”

“Please wait for a moment, Chester-san.”

“It’s fine.”

They were arguing about something.

Well...that really wasn't alright.

When I looked at Sheila, she was furrowing her brows in discomfort. That's right. She was rather cautious about having me meet with Irmhild.

In urban areas, especially here at Termuilles, people were quite open-minded to the first of the foreign races, the Elves and the Dwarves. Such a foundation was related to accepting friendly, harmless Monsters. The Adventurer's Guild should have detailed facts about the present condition of Monsters.

However, they were just open-minded. I wasn't saying that there wasn't any discrimination or oppression.

Grace was also in a similar situation. Her blood-sucking impulses wouldn't cause her any real damage if she had her Cursed Artifact equipped, and that was unrelated to items with appearances that I didn't know. If it weren't for that, even if she was a mixed blood, she would have probably received the same treatment as normal vampires. That was why I could understand Sheila's feelings of worry.

For now, perhaps it was correct to be cautious if it was someone I didn't know. I couldn't force my way through the room to leave. When I looked at the person next to Heather, I saw a brown-haired man. He was wearing a surcoat with a crest on it and was armed with a sword.

Judging from his appearance, he was a member of the Knights. He seemed to be around 20 years old.

Although he had an invigorating smile on first glance, his current impression on me wasn't that great. I still couldn't tell whether that was intentional or if this was his natural personality.

"Yo, are you the rumored Magician-kun?"

"It's Theodore Gartner."

"My name is Chester Grenbell. I've brought an invitation letter to an evening banquet that is being held at the Palace. Well, I went to your house yesterday, but you appeared to be absent, so that ended in failure. After investigating, I heard that you had gone into the Labyrinth."

"Is that so?"

"Well, it's fine since I made it in time. It will take place five days from now. Although it's a social event being held by the Palace, they took the lead and wanted to invite you, who defeated a Demon, to attend it. An invitation letter was arranged for Hurry-kun."

(TL: Hurry-kun refers to Theo seeming to always being in a hurry and never being around.)

"A social event, you say?"

"It's nothing special. His Majesty also has plans to attend it."

...Five days from now, huh? That didn't seem to be in a hurry at all. Rather than calling it a summons from the Palace, I felt that they were summoning the rumored person as a 'Surprise Guest'.

However, why would a Knight bring an invitation letter to me?

Well, I won't ask him. It would be troublesome to retort to him poorly and end up having to have a long talk together.

The Palace Magicians and Knights didn't get along with each other, so it was probably not a good setting to be in.

"Understood. If that's the case, then it's impossible for me to not make an appearance."

"Yeah, well then, it's certain that I've delivered it now?"

Chester quickly withdrew and left. What was that for?

"I'm sorry, Theodore-san. I even told him to wait in the lobby."

Heather bowed.

"It can't be helped that he entered on his own. Rather, who is he?"

"He's someone who recently made a name for himself among the Knights. It's rumored that he has a fair amount of skills. Umm, he said it was a social event five days from now, right? It's probably a banquet being hosted by the Knights. Since he said that His Majesty is also attending it this year, they probably...had plans to make it grand. It's still going according to schedule despite there being a Demon disturbance, you know."

A Knight came because it was being hosted by Knights, huh? Well, the reason was easy to understand.

"Umm, by saying this to me with this kind of timing...will they have me be present so that they can congratulate me for my win against the Demon?"

"Yeah, that appears to be so..."

Heather subtly furrowed her eyebrows at my words.

Although some of the soldiers had passed away, the preparations they had done until now would be wasted if they practiced self-control.

Being held at the Palace and having the King himself make an appearance...they probably didn't want to simply cancel it.

That was why, by summoning me, it would be more along the lines of hosting a banquet to celebrate my victory, or to honor the brave soldiers who fell.

If that was the case, then my attendance was necessary. Although he said it was an invitation letter, I would play an essential role, and they wanted me to attend it no matter what.

That was why he called it a social event rather than a banquet.

By quickly giving me an invitation letter, they probably wanted my consent, since they were the ones who wanted to host it, and by sending a famous Knight, they probably wanted to create a situation where I would be regarded as someone important and appeal to me, or make it so that I couldn't refuse.

One look at my attitude said that I was a fine young man.

Although he immediately withdrew, since I quickly gave my consent, it was possible that he wouldn't have approved of me and would refuse to stand down.

...Well, the person they chose was completely wrong though.

Although I didn't know Chester's personality well, if that was how he naturally was, as long as he had his military arts, he wasn't suited to be a messenger at all. If this was done on purpose, I could imagine the discomfort within his heart at becoming a lackey for the higher ups.

"Will you attend it?"

"Unfortunately, I've already received the invitation letter."

As for me, I thought that the story of me defeating a Demon would be brought up sooner or later.

I still wanted to go into the Labyrinth for the time being. Having them freely decide my background while I was absent would be troublesome though.

I would attend it if I couldn't escape, and there was definitely no way that I could smoothly come to an agreement with the higher ups by talking about the situation and my thoughts.

Later on, I want to investigate the information Lynette obtained and what that will lead to.

--

Chapter 40

--

Chapter 40 – Scouting

“Three on the ceiling, and two in that area with the deep pool of water. Five total.”

Sheila’s ears twitched, and after sniffing from time to time, she declared it like a prediction.

“Grace-sama, please let me take care of the bats.”

“Then leave the frogs to me.”

Grace headed towards the deep pool, and then Ashley approached the dark area where the bats were lurking while chanting.

Along the way, frogs jumped out of the water.

Furthermore, one of the frogs croaked and stretched out its tongue. However, using the axe in her left hand, Grace cut off the one that struck at her, and then she wrapped the other frog’s tongue around the blade of the axe in her right hand, and pulled on it with all her might.

Facing off against the frogs, which had popped out of the water full of vigor, she sent them flying after showing her ability to wrap her chains around them effortlessly, and they stuck to the flat wall.

“Venom Mist.”

The bats that flew down from the ceiling were struck with the violet smoke Ashley cast, and all of a sudden, they stalled in the air before falling to the ground. It was a Rank 4 Water Spell, and it was probably amongst the more difficult Spells Ashley could use...but if one understood the direction they would take, then they could easily prepare a spell beforehand.

“That went well. We didn’t overlook anything, so we didn’t receive any surprise attacks.”

Grace said with a smile.

That was true. Even though it didn't mean that we were enhancing ourselves with Magic, Sheila's five senses weren't ordinary. Her sight, sense of smell, and hearing shouldn't be compared to a human's, but were more like radar. She was just displaying her skills in front of me.

Although there was similar Detection Magic like Life Detection, the more eyes and methods to detect things like that, the better.

Because we spoke too long with Irmhild, who was still recovering, we brought the visit to an end and decided to go into the Labyrinth, in accordance with my plans.

It seemed like the victims of the kidnapping incident weren't handled roughly on the grounds of "preserving the quality of goods," or in other words, because of their value. Irmhild herself had concealed the fact that she was a Lamia, and since she said that she had only become weaker because of the lack of meals, even if she claimed to be weak due to a recent illness, her condition didn't appear to be anything serious.

As for why we brought Sheila along in the Labyrinth exploration...there were two main reasons. I noticed that Sheila and I had matching interests, and Chester's behavior had ended up making her, who was nervous due to Irmhild's matter, angry.

Thus, Sheila had suggested that we should gather information regarding the Knights all the way up until the social event five days from now.

Compared to the other two, Irmhild was in a bit of a delicate position. It seemed that Sheila had unfortunately found out that Irmhild was living in the city while concealing her race, and the Demon Lynette disguising herself as a human had occurred at the same time.

Thanks to that, how she would be dealt with was probably unclear.

Irmhild was currently registered as an Adventurer and had accumulated achievements, to a certain extent, from taking requests and exploring the Labyrinth. Therefore, the kidnapped victims had encouraged her, and the Adventurer's Guild was on close terms with her.

Although there were probably adventurers and people who saw her as an ally, according to the Guild, she only had a relationship with them and not the

Kingdom itself.

That was why it would be troublesome for Sheila to get involved with a place she didn't know well, and moreover, with a person who was employed there. All the more so when it came to the type of humans who neglected rules and procedures.

I couldn't deny that there might be any self-righteous judgement passed down on Irmhild or any subjective slander spreading around upon returning to the Knights.

Adding in her hostility towards Chester, and considering Irmhild's present situation, she probably wanted to sell out and create a relationship with me. Since Grace was beside me, I could probably trust her.

Well...I would like to welcome such a give-and-take relationship. Our means to hold and even collect information, will become a powerful weapon, and even a shield.

For personal reasons, I didn't really like the Thieves Guild, and the number of acquaintances I had there was small. If I were to use an Information Room later, having Sheila as a mediator would ease the process.

With that in mind, I let Sheila participate in our Labyrinth exploration. Even if I said it was give-and-take, I had received information from her, and I shouldn't take Irmhild for granted later on just because it would be convenient for me. I wanted to make matters that were behind my back clear as long as she gathered information for me.

Just in case, if I claimed that Sheila had acted independently and I had acted according to my intentions, Sheila would be handled differently if she were to be caught while gathering information.

At that time, having someone make a suggestion wouldn't be important. I felt I should bear responsibility if that happened. Although it wasn't like acquaintances would be important enough to become a 'Support Shield', I should get involved and defend her to some extent.

Heather had apparently also spoken with Sheila about maybe forming a party, so she probably wanted Sheila's relationship with me to be clear by having us explore the Labyrinth together.

Having talked about this with Grace's group, we came to the conclusion that it was fine for her to be in the party with the role of a Thief or a Scout, which led to the current situation.

Although Sheila's true strength was unclear, if it was somewhere along these floors, bringing her along into the Labyrinth wouldn't be much of an issue, nor would it be a cause for anxiety. I had come to know the level of her information gathering ability and the sharpness of her senses.

"Can I personally take charge this time?"

"Will you be fine with that?"

"I have confidence in myself. This will let you see my skills, so I want to show you what I can do."

"Understood."

Sheila took the lead and started searching the Cave Area. After proceeding for a while, her feet stopped.

"Found them, let's go."

Saying that, Sheila held a dagger in a backhand grip. She ran towards a wall with nothing on it. I couldn't hear the sound of her feet, even though she was dashing at a reasonable speed. She followed up with her dagger facing towards the empty sky while running up the wall, and jumping up high, she cut the bats into pieces with two slashes, as if they were being drawn in. She then shifted her body in the air and landed on the ground.

"Well done, Sheila-san."

"Thanks."

I see.

Since she had grasped their locations and predicted their actions, she could move quickly and launch an attack, rather than allowing her opponents to move. Although her Taijutsu was quite good, I felt that her actual movement was faster than that of the opponents she decided to fight. Her selling point was her lightness and she probably had an affinity for light weapons, but taking up the vanguard position didn't necessarily mean that it was her job. From the looks of it, Sheila didn't seem to be a burden.

It seemed we could advance with an efficiency we didn't have before.

//

"The next ones are coming."

Several pig-like Monsters showed up while moving slowly. They were Orcs, and there were four of them. They had high strength, like tough soldiers, but they weren't smart. They started to emerge from the 17th floor. If someone were to talk of Orcs, they would be under the impression that they had a high reproductive ability and would chase after females of other races, but the Orcs that appeared in the Labyrinth weren't like that...Still, I felt like they would head after Grace's group rather than me.

"Bugii!!"

One of them brandished their battle-axe and headed towards Grace, but she engaged it head-on. The Orc's battle-axe and Grace's Labrys clashed with each other, creating sounds of clashing metal.

However, it wasn't even a decent match. The one who prevailed was Grace. She bent the axe's grip, which was forged from iron, as if it were sculptured candy that had been heated up. She followed through with some force and felled the Orc.

Not slowing down, she rotated her body as if it were a tornado and engulfed one more, crushing it. The way she handled the Orcs was as if it were child's play to her.

The Orc, who was distracted by Grace, had its neck cut by Sheila, who came down from above without making any sound.

Before the blood splashed around, Sheila kicked its shoulders, jumped backwards, and broke away from it.

One remaining. Ashley waited in the rear, and I, who had taken no damage, took the lead.

Spinning my Magic Staff as if it were a windmill, I engulfed the Orc, striking its head, knocking it down to the ground.

At the same time, I stepped on its throat, expanded a Magic Circle, and killed it with lightning that came through the sole of my foot.

Well then, Orcs, huh? Although they had a lot of parts that could be extracted for preparing meals...If Humanoid Monsters learned about the actual ingredients, their appetite would vanish.

//

Just as we found the stairs to the 18th floor and the stele, we decided to withdraw. Apart from our group, Sheila probably had a lot of work ahead.

"I knew that Theodore was strong...but that made me lose my confidence."

Sheila said such a thing after we returned to the Shrine.

Grace was a bit special, and Ashley was really amazing compared to the children who were the same age as her. Although Sheila probably thought she didn't show enough appeal...the standards I required weren't that high. She was probably worried what I would think about it.

"Well, that was plenty, wasn't it? It'll be a pleasure to work with you from now on."

"...Yeah. It'll be a pleasure."

Sheila nodded.

"If things have been decided, I'll move onto investigations."

"For now, please don't be reckless and take dangerous risks by yourself. We'll make a decision after consulting each other if that happens. I'll lend you my familiar at that time, too. At any rate, it's five days from now, so putting the suspicious people in order will be plenty. Later on, showing yourself once a day will be enough to confirm your safety, so that will put me at ease."

"Understood."

After telling Sheila about my plans, she laughed happily, just for a bit. There wasn't any need to make Sheila do the impossible for matters related to me. As for me, I would get to enjoy the hassle, to the extent of having known who paid attention to me, and having known who I could trust.

Well then, five days from now, huh? I wonder what will happen.

--

Chapter 41

--

Chapter 41 – At Theorem Palace

The banquet this year was supposedly a formal event, but according to the information Sheila had gathered, it was more of a normal event where one could enjoy pleasant conversations over dinner. We would also watch the Knights display the fruits of their standard training in a courtyard as a public demonstration, which was rather different from a typical event. The Knights of the Weldogal Kingdom who persisted to the end would have their training results announced to the Royal Family. This was for the sake of displaying the superiority and bravery of the Kingdom Knights.

I felt like them honoring the soldiers that died on duty this year added an implication of renewing the oath to protect the Kingdom's peace. When attending such a banquet, it was customary for the invited guests to bring their fiance or spouse. Nobles used banquets, dances, and the like, to search for arranged marriage partners, and they decided whether or not to chat with someone after seeing if they had a fiance.

With that, I headed to Theorem Palace together with Grace and Ashley.

Grace wasn't in her usual pinafore, but was actually wearing a formal evening dress.

The dress was black, with a vivid blue pattern, and I thought that it suited her well, even though the colors were similar to those of her maid outfit. This was apparently made for her when she was at the Gartner residence, for special occasions like banquets or evening parties.

As for Ashley, her dress was an almost lavender light purple bolero with a white base. The frills and ribbons were the same color. Although it was a calm, cute design, it was elegant and suited Ashley well.

...Well, if you put the two of them together, they were a sight to behold. As for my outfit, it was my usual coat, which was provided to me. It qualified as formal clothing, and I had given up on trying to look better, since this appearance was good enough for the public.

Compared to these two exceedingly beautiful women, rather than calling it mediocre, my appearance was average. Regardless, it was questionable as to whether or not I fit in next to these two.

Well...Even if I said that, it couldn't be helped, since nothing had even started yet.

At best, I didn't want to be exposed, and would rather be seen as an escort.

These two were each wearing a flower in their hair that matched their hair color as well. The flowers apparently meant that they didn't want to be courted by someone else, since they were already my chosen partners. The man who was escorting them would automatically be considered to be their partner. The two of them probably chose to wear that flower beforehand.

"Shall we go then? Your hands."

"Yes."

"Fufu."

As evening neared, the streets in Termuilles were dyed red. I would escort the two of them in a carriage sent by Theorem Palace.

"Well then, take care."

"Yeah, we'll be off now."

After I waved at Sheila, who had come to see us off, the carriage departed.

"I know there is a reason behind this...but having Theo escorting us like this... somehow makes me happy."

"That's right. Going out like this with Theodore-sama sure makes it exciting."

Somehow, the two of them seemed to be enjoying this. If something like this made them happy, then perhaps it would be better to create more situations like this. Not just evening parties, but also going out to plays and such.

...That's right. Termuilles was really close to the sea; shall we try heading there

next time?

//

After crossing a drawbridge, the carriage proceeded towards a huge, magnificent building made of stone, the Theorem Palace. If I were to describe it briefly, then I would point out the building's structure, which was located within the castle walls. The building within the remarkably large center was the Tower of the King, which housed the Royal Family. The social event this time was being held in the reception hall adjacent to the Tower of the Knights and the Drill Grounds. It seems the building wasn't created by the Labyrinth, but was added by the Knights later on to be used for various matters.

The Drill Grounds, which had a wide, clear space, was illuminated with Magic and bonfires. This was probably where the martial arts demonstration would be held, since I saw Knights on standby, lined up with their horses and dragons. Part of the first floor of the building had turned into a Terrace Cafe, which was connected to the Dance Hall and was lined with tables. I guess this place was created under the premise of holding this kind of event. Although finely dressed guests had already gathered, after handing in my invitation, I was led to a seat on the second floor balcony.
...VIP treatment, huh? Hmm.

I didn't really understand the Knights' intentions. Were they picking a fight with me, or did they hold me in high regard instead?

“Ooh, it’s Theodore?”

The person that greeted me with a smile was the vice-president of the Adventurer’s Guild, Holy Sword Oswald. This was a martial arts event hosted by the Knights, after all. He wasn’t invited, he was personally selected.

“Hello. It’s a pleasant evening, isn’t it?.”

“Yeah. There are open seats there. I wonder if you’re fine sitting next to this old man.”

“To view this display of martial arts with Oswald-sama is quite interesting, don’t you think?”

I sat down at the table next to him in the spot I was offered.

“As for me, it would be more interesting for you to display your skills. I didn’t get to see your aerial battle nor Staff handling because I took too much time evacuating and guarding people.”

“Unfortunately, for today, I have the role of being an escort.”

He even tried to size me up. I didn’t look like someone who would wave his Staff around and cause a racket. After I answered him with my arms spread open, Oswald looked at Grace’s and Ashley’s hair accessory and nodded with a ‘Hmm.’

I couldn’t tell if he had understood something, but I shouldn’t ask about it too much.

After we introduced each other, I asked Oswald a question.

“Does Oswald-sama receive an invitation every year?”

“Just this once. The ones who have appeared here have all not done much, so there aren’t any interesting guys.”

“Is that so?”

“The Leader of the Knights this time is quite something, though. It appears he lost so much face that he can’t even brandish his sword.”

Oswald shrugged his shoulders while looking towards the Drilling Grounds.

“Do you know of a young Knight named Chester?”

“That Flying Dragon Rider, huh? Amongst the Knights, I think he’s the only one who isn’t here right now.”

Dragon Knight Chester. Although Knights were Knights, it appeared he was a Knight who rode Dragons.

According to Sheila’s investigations, he was accomplished in both literary and martial arts, and his reputation was flawless.

Sheila said it was very suspicious, but that was just a normal opinion. He wasn’t related to very suspicious figures, even if he did something suspicious one time. Although I thought that him having that suspicious behavior was probably a rumor, I didn’t really know why he would do such a thing.

“Chester-sama, I wish you good luck in today’s practice.”

“Please be careful to not get any injuries.”

“Haha. It’ll be fine. I have an excellent Healing Magician on standby, and my weapon is in its Habaki. Something would rarely occur.”

(TN: Habaki = a metal collar used to prevent a sword from falling out)

Just as you would have thought, I heard such a voice. A figure that appeared to be Chester was in one of the balcony seats, wearing a ceremonial outfit. He was accompanied by several noble girls and was gathering attention from the surroundings.

Well...it was said that he was the most successful out of the Knights. I really felt like he was picture-perfect.

Chester put on a smile, and after standing there while giving his greetings to the surrounding girls, directly approached Oswald.

“So, Oswald-sama is here. I’m so glad you could make it. Our plans have been delayed a bit. I’ll give notice and apologize as soon as I give my greetings.”

“Is that so? I’m expecting good things from you at the display today.”

“I shall live up to your expectations and work hard.”

With that, he gave a bow to Oswald.

“And Theodore-kun, I’m glad you could make it today.”

“Yeah, Lord Chester.”

“Please enjoy the display of our martial arts.”

“Allow me to have a look at it.”

His attitude was the same as before.

“It’s also a pleasure to meet these beautiful ladies. I call myself Chester.”

Although Chester greeted Grace and Ashley, Grace looked at him coldly for a moment and finished with a nod. The same went for Ashley. He did not even give a hint of a friendly smile and ended it with a light bow.

...Well, this was likely the case. Those two had heard and knew about his behaviour at the Guild, as well as Sheila’s information. Even if it was too late for him to be friendly with us, the more perfect he was, the more likely he would

appear to be suspicious, rather than deserving our trust. Besides, I had my own opinions, so even if it was a mere formality, it looked like we gave our greetings. Rather than looked, it was more that we actually gave them. Whether or not this was the reaction he was expecting, Chester's expression stiffened for a moment as he smiled.

"This is quite difficult, you are making me shy. Well then, I'll be going around to give my greetings to other people, so if you would excuse me."

He immediately recovered and left.

Did he always think positively, or did he just smooth things over? Just then, there was one thing I didn't understand... no matter how you looked at it, he wasn't shy. That reaction was worthy of being nonexistent.

"He somehow reminds me of Byron."

Grace said.

Yeah...the way he played the hypocrite in front of adults was well done, that guy. In short, Grace's evaluation of him was abysmal.

"He's a person I don't understand well. Rather than that, the embroidery of this tablecloth...is really exquisite, you know."

"Yeah, that's true. It uses a technique I've never seen before."

I felt the two of them had pulled themselves together, but unfortunately they started their girls' talk.

--

Chapter 42

--

Chapter 42 – Reunion With Albert

As expected, within the group of Knights, the ones who were friendly with Chester were the Dragon Knights who shared the same rank as him. And, most likely, the superior within those Dragon Knights was Vice-Commander Greg. Even amongst the Knights, this man's evaluation appeared to be divided. Speaking about it idealistically, he didn't really show superiority as a commander, but was the type of person who usually handled things with his spirit and gut. Since he talked about things boldly whenever he opened his mouth, I felt that...he was popular with the lower ranks and was hated by the nobles.

Since Chester was appointed under him and was rising up in the world, then he probably got along well with Greg.

Since that was the case, it was either Chester or Greg. Perhaps I should be careful coming into contact with nobles who had a connection with Greg. After being lost in thought while looking at the Knights and the soldiers at the drilling ground below me, the horns sounded off. The guests began to quiet down, and the figure of King Melvin appeared from the balcony of the Knights Tower. His age was around 50. He had the image of a stern, great man.

“Everyone, We are sorry for troubling you.”

Melvin spoke to the square in a solemn voice.

“Although this event was originally supposed to be a banquet to help people deepen their friendship, those words aren't suitable at this hour. As everyone knows, several of Our soldiers gave up their lives for the Kingdom during the Cardiff incident and the appearance of the Demon. We considered not hosting a banquet this evening, thinking about the feelings of the wives, children, and

parents who were left behind.”

(TL: Royal we.)

Melvin stopped talking for a moment, before closing his eyes and stretching out both of his arms.

“However, We received a plea from a number of people and therefore acknowledged the opening of tonight’s banquet. This banquet is held so We do not forget their loyalty and bravery to Us. It is so We do not forget the names and faces of our fellow companions. As long as there are brave men like them, the glorious Weldogal assures you that attacks from the likes of Demons will be naught but a trifling matter. Although Our Knights have honor and glory, they have inherited it from the souls and wills of those who fell. Everyone, drink, eat, and enjoy this evening to your heart’s content. This will be our farewell to the brave people who devoted their souls to the Kingdom.”

Melvin lifted a cup and said this:

“To the brave soldiers!”

After saying that, he finished his cup in one gulp. Everyone present followed suit, and then cheers resounded in the square. Melvin nodded calmly, and after looking at his surroundings like he was calming down the cheering, he said:

“And then, the little Hero who confronted the Demon single-handedly and destroyed it. We think that We are happy about the fact that such a person is hidden within our Kingdom, and the fact that he braved the danger, regardless of his own interests, and fearlessly confronted it. We also asked him to come to the banquet this evening.”

Melvin then looked directly towards me and laughed, showing me a large grin on his face.

His expression somehow reminded me of a mischievous child’s. I knew that the invited guests had gathered their attention on me. Hmm.

...King Melvin. If I were to talk about his nature, then he would be a simple and sturdy military man. He probably realized that I got along with Oswald, but in BFO, Players had no contact with his name nor his appearance.

Due to that, it was the same as not knowing Melvin’s nature. One’s reputation and face didn’t always match up with one’s true intentions. Even the King got

involved with political situations here, but that shouldn't determine whether he was trustworthy or not.

The intentions of the Knights were theirs, the intentions of the King were his, and I still didn't know if Chester understood his surroundings.

After Melvin sat down in the large chair that was prepared for him on the balcony, the musicians began to play majestic music. Although elegant music was flowing for the ordinary, simple speech, the meaning behind it was probably different.

Since the results of the daily training would be shown to the King, the infantry and cavalry formed a line and presented the rearrangement of their formation. A command was issued, and they changed to the next formation. It didn't mean the skill of the whole army was high, but it was satisfying to see them move in perfect coordination as they were commanded.

After this, the program would surely continue on to a joust or a mounted archery competition.

What they would be doing now was a Tourney, a team jousting battle. The armored Knights mounted their horses and dragons, faced each other, and then started charging at each other. From the looks of it, they were aiming to knock their opponents off of their mounts by jabbing them with their spears as they passed by each other...Well, it was a competition.

Their spears were made mainly of easily broken processed wood, and even though there were flat caps on the tips of the spears, which lessened its killing power, there was still the danger of being pierced by fragments of wood and falling down from their mounts, so it wasn't completely safe.

Oswald explained some of the good points to me.

Cheers sounded from the invited guests every time the opposing Knight was knocked off from his mount by a spear.

It appeared that one team wore red-plume helmets and the other wore blue-plume helmets, splitting them into groups of five people each.

As for how a match was carried out, despite the blue team vanguard having defeated three people in a row, they were, in turn, defeated by the red team's sub-captain.

The red sub-captain let out a shrill cheer every time his opponents were knocked

off their mounts.

He faced the audience and waved his hands, becoming increasingly lively. Although I couldn't see his face because of the helmet, it appeared that person was Chester.

Oswald did say that it would be natural for the red team to win...and I felt that Chester was definitely superior to the others.

However, Oswald didn't appear to be that pleased by it. Even though cheers rose from Chester's victories, he didn't look interested in it.

"Is there a problem with Chester?"

"Rather than Chester...it's the Knights as a whole. That guy personally finished this without looking bad, so that isn't interesting, and even if they can't engage in close combat with him, the Knights right now are a bunch of cowards. They know this well, which means that they are setting the stage and waiting for the second strongest guy in the blue vanguard."

"...I see."

So that meant that it was a half-rigged match. It was a match between members of the same organization, but I thought that the excitement from this was necessary, since this was a social event in the end.

Moreover, Oswald made quite the serious complaint.

The way Chester fought was rather normal, making him popular with the crowd, and when taking that into consideration, Oswald's evaluation of Chester ended up being 'He is neat and orderly, so it isn't interesting.'

"That's why you should go and participate in this. It will serve as a good stimulus for them, you know."

"What nonsense is that, this guy."

After I dodged Oswald's joke, a woman approached us.

"Excuse me for disturbing you during your pleasant chat. Are you Theodore Gartner-sama? My name is Annie Erimson."

"...Hello."

"I'm a member of the Magician's Unit. I'm here to give my greeting and talk

with Theodore-sama. If you're fine with it, will you please come with me?"

...The Magician's Unit, huh. Didn't they oppose the Knights? Perhaps they would ask me about some kind of important information?
Even though this place was for people to mingle with each other, if the partners who had to attend with me became a popular topic of conversation, then it would be natural to narrow down the candidates.

"That would be fine. I'll accompany you."

"I'll go with you too."

When I stood up, Grace and Ashley did the same. It appeared that the two of them intended to come together with me.

"Will you be fine watching the match?"

"No, please allow me to come."

Ashley smiled.

"Well, I guess this event is rather boring. Especially with being your equal and fighting alongside you."

"Hmm."

...I had wondered about that.

As we were led by Annie, we made our way to the Knight's Tower, which was adjacent to the Drilling Grounds.

It was strictly guarded, since it was likely to house the Royal Family on the higher floors, but Annie didn't hesitate as we proceeded onward.

"Here it is."

We were given permission to enter a room.
The person who was there...was someone I already knew, and he came to greet me.

"Yo! It's a pleasure to meet you."

In other words, it was Prince Albert putting on a friendly smile.
Today, he was accompanied by his younger sister, Princess Marleen, and his fiance, Ophelia.

Was Marleen shy around strangers? After looking at me, she hid in Prince Albert's shadow and continued to watch me timidly. Ophelia was more dignified.

"This one here is—"

Although Annie tried to introduce him, Albert interrupted her with his hand.

"That's fine. I really hate doing formal things after all. I'm sorry for bringing you here halfway through the matches. I wanted to talk with you in private, no matter what."

"Is that so?"

"I'm Albert, the fourth Prince of this country. This is my little sister, Marleen, and umm...my friend, Ophelia."

Yeah, I already knew. I had expected to come into contact with him if I came to the Palace.

Prince Albert looked like he wanted to become a Magic Engineer in the future, so I understood how he could create connections with the Magician's Unit.

I knew that he was a friendly person...Well, this was our first meeting, and as long as he was the Prince, I probably couldn't deal with him like I did when he was Alfred.

"These are my fiancees, Ashley and Grace."

Following the proper etiquette, they greeted him and introduced themselves.

"Fiancees...not bad, you."

Prince Albert looked at me in amazement.

"I'm sure the Prince also has a fiancee, right?"

Ophelia laughed with a 'Fufufu' as the shadow on her face darkened.

"Well...um, I'll admit that Ophelia is my fiancee."

Prince Albert blushed slightly and rubbed his index finger on his cheek. It appeared that he was embarrassed to introduce his fiancee.

"Well, what should I say? I had you come here since I heard about you from a friend. His name is Talcott."

Right, he did bring up such a topic.

As for me, who knew that he was a puppet, it would be a bit problematic if I showed a reaction to that. It appeared that he intended to hide the fact that he was Alfred.

"He told me that he wanted to express his gratitude to you."

"Is that so? I thought that he wouldn't want to thank me."

"You're free to think like that, and Talcott is free to express his gratitude. He definitely wanted to say it."

"...Understood."

Although he probably wanted to relay Talcott's message to me, I didn't think it would be to that extent.

Well then...Exactly what did Prince Albert have in mind, I wonder?

--

Chapter 43

--

Chapter 43 – The Desire of the Prince and the Knights

“I thought you would understand, too. Relaying his words doesn’t mean he will show up.”

Albert said that with a serious look.

“Right now, our Magicians, servants, and the like are being mobilized into Decipher Groups at the castle. They are so eager to decipher old documents that they are turning the Library inside out.”

“The aftermath of the Demon incident, is it?”

I had thought about investigating the connection between the Demon and the Moon Shrine a little bit, but it was apparently becoming an important matter.

“That’s right. I’m more suited for learning in classrooms than training in Magic, so they have let me voluntarily help with the investigation...As for the Moon Shrine, it’s not a mistake for it to be sealed, since it is rather dangerous. We have also found evidence of a letter containing Dimension Stone research that was sent outside the City.”

To the outside, right?

It turned out that the Demon had companions.

“Is it all right...for you to talk about such things with me?”

“Well, I’m not really talking about anything concrete, and it’s not like anything will happen, even if we talk about it. You might get investigated by His Majesty and, in fact, this isn’t even the main subject. However, I’d be happy if you could at least keep the things I’ve mentioned secret. There have also been hidden schemes to try and make you known to the public, you know.”

Albert placed his index finger on his mouth and laughed.

Hmm. Was Albert...warning me? Just like he said, even though Albert was searching for talented people, it wasn't just out of the kindness of his heart.

"Then, what is the main subject?"

"It appears that a portion of the Knights oppose you. I thought about whether it was prudent to inform you about it or not."

'I guess it's better to realize it now, since it has been said by the Prince too."

"Eh? You knew about it? Then, was this assistance unnecessary?"

"Not at all."

Having Sheila sneak into the Palace was impossible. The risk was too high. Rather, let's stop there.

I only knew a portion of their background, which had been brought to light, mainly the name of the group's leader and their connections. Even if I were to guess about various things, one needed such information to talk about it.

"Will the situation change to where the Knights are cornered?"

"The Knights and Soldiers have talked about forming search groups to descend into the Labyrinth. Even the Kingdom wants clues on how to invade the currently sealed Moon Shrine. Our Soldiers and Knights want to reverse their bad reputation, since they couldn't show off their ability during the recent Demon incident."

"I see..."

The Knights were going into the Labyrinth, huh? Was that why the promising Chester, who was under Greg, was getting involved with me? Perhaps they had thought of me as a rival in the same trade since I had defeated the Demon and descended the Labyrinth?

If Chester's reputation lived up to his surroundings, then perhaps his usual behavior was intentional.

For example, his goal would be to inspire hostility towards me, using my own trust as a weapon. If I spoke ill of Chester because of this, I'd think the people around us would trap Chester with slander.

If I considered the fact that Greg was popular with those below him and was

hated by those above him, I'd think Chester was the same. There was a possibility of the people below him looking down on me if that appeared regularly. If the Knights were to look at me, then I'd be a person more aligned towards the Magician's Unit.

However, the problem was why they were inspiring hostility towards me. It probably wasn't clear with that alone. What exactly were they expecting by showing me that kind of behavior?

"Well, I think the people who belong to the Dragon Knights have something to be ashamed of."

"Huh, why?"

"The flying dragons don't have a turn to go into the Labyrinth, you know."

Oh, was that it? I understood the reason.

"In regards to my method of Flight, has it been talked about at the Palace?"

"Umm, that is...Oh, was it like that?"

As expected, Prince Albert was quick to understand. It seemed he guessed what I wanted to say with that alone.

When considering that we were the only ones who could oppose the Demons that could fly in the air, and that I could battle in midair, if the Magician's Unit ended up being able to do the same thing, they would become unrivaled in the air. At the very least, the disadvantage of being picked off by the Demons in the sky, one by one, would disappear from the Magician's Unit.

After that...there was the possibility that I would personally be employed by the Palace.

The reason was easy to understand. In short, it would jeopardize their vested interest.

I didn't really have...such a reason for defeating the Demon, though. I didn't think he would understand, even if I explained it, and it didn't mean that the situation would change even if he understood, so there was no point in trying.

"About your method of Flight, there have been requests for information

disclosure. However, it was labeled as a secret skill and they were rejected by His Majesty, so that it wouldn't leak out and make an enemy of competent personnel."

By Melvin, huh?

"Control ability and experience is essential for that, so all of the disclosed information is nothing other than what was seen."

"Haha, it seems like that's the case. That's why I feel that I...understand your logic. The Magicians who aren't involved with the old documents are struggling greatly with the combined use of Levitation and Shield, as well as managing it with or without Chants. They've given up hope for using this in battle because of that."

It was wasteful to pay for this information, since it was easy to understand and had a relatively high priority, so it looked like they were taking care of this responsibility by themselves. I wonder when Magicians who can carry out aerial battles will start to appear.

"Hmm, I don't think there are any Magicians, at all, who could do it, though?"

"Old man Rickard was able to do it. It was awful and he ended up throwing up because he couldn't get used to the three-dimensional movements, though."

Albert shrugged.

...Is that so.

"By the way...Is there something Your Highness wishes of me for the price of this information?"

"I thought the information I've given to you wasn't really that meaningful though."

"No, it was very useful, so I thought that I should give you something in return, since I understand that you're trying to become allies with me."

"...Well, getting acquainted with you was a sufficient reward...That's right. I have a friend by my side named Alfred, who wishes to become a Magic Engineer."

...Huh?

"I think he could create various interesting items if we have your Magic Control ability. If you're alright with it, I want you to help out on various things, if he makes an appearance."

"...Understood. I'll give you my word."

I, who knew that he led a double life, put on a smile that made me look like a bad person.

However, I knew where he was coming from. Should I head there? Personally, I thought it would be better if he were more straightforward. I knew what Albert's true desire was, and what he was aiming for.

I took a stealthy glance at Marleen and Ophelia. Those two were laughing without worries as they chatted pleasantly with Grace and Ashley.

...Well, that's fine, I guess? I was still next to Albert, so maybe they didn't trust me yet.

//

After saying my thanks to Albert, we left and had returned to the second floor terrace of the reception hall when Chester showed up.

"Theodore-kun, huh? The individual match from earlier ended in a splendid victory. I've gone around and greeted our honored guests."

He said with a smile on his face.

"Is that so?"

Well, I completely hated anything troublesome, so I decided to make it clear to him about where I stood. Should I try speaking with Chester and throwing him a straight ball?

"Umm, I want to talk about something with Lord Chester directly, so I wonder if you could spare a bit of time?"

When I said that, Chester opened his eyes widely and stared at me. After that, the edges of his mouth rose significantly.

"With me? Fine. I've finished giving my round of greetings. Right now, they're doing land dragon races, and it won't be my turn for a while. I thought about talking with the Demon Killer Hero-kun without any hindrances."

“Do you have an available room somewhere?”

“There’s an underground training area beneath the Knight’s Tower for when it rains. How about going there?”

— —

Chapter 44

--

Chapter 44 – At the Underground Training Grounds

I faced Chester at the Underground Training Grounds beneath the Knight's Tower.

I confronted him with the main subject, ignoring introductions.

“I’ve heard rumors.”

“What kind of rumors?”

“That the Dragon Knights are feeling insecure because of the future development of Flight techniques. Lord Chester doesn’t have to worry, but do you have anything you want to tell me about this? Could it possibly be Lord Greg’s plan?”

After I said that, Chester frowned slightly. It was only for an instant, and then he immediately put on a smile to fix his expression.

“Let’s see, what was it?”

“At any rate, there isn’t anyone else around, and I understand that Lord Chester doesn’t have a good impression of me. I would prefer it if you could share your true intentions with me.”

“My true intentions, is it?”

After Chester closed his eyes, he shrugged.

“Very well. It’s true that I don’t like you. A filthy Magician is trying to venture into our territory, as if he owned the place. His Majesty is also interested in you. Commander-dono also appears to believe that the banquet wouldn’t have been held if you weren’t summoned. He’s taken a fancy to you, I think?”

I had heard that the Magicians and the Knights weren’t on good terms with each other. I didn’t know the details, though.

"Why go as far as hating the Magicians?"

"Why? I've heard about how you battle. When that Demon was your opponent, you first launched a surprise attack with a large spell. The movements you made afterwards were basically another surprise attack that made it unable to fly around. It's always like this with Magicians. You don't fight the way an honorable person fights. Please change that, before it's too late."

"...Are you saying that seriously?"

"Of course. It's fine if you don't leave the Adventurer's Guild or the Labyrinth. However, I don't like people like you getting involved with our glorious Kingdom. It's not just me; Lord Greg has the same opinion."

...Perhaps he was a guy on the path to Knighthood? I did realize that the Knights didn't have anything like Demons as an opponent. Their methods of provocation were lukewarm at best, and even if Greg had something on his mind, it was probably because of his personality. In short, Chester seemed to be taking what we were talking about right now into serious consideration, considering his position.

"If you ended up fighting a Demon with those thoughts, you'll die, you know?"

"Hou, thanks for saying that. Unfortunately, I've never fought with a Demon before."

"...I had no intention of saying that as a joke, nor am I being foolish."

"I'm just saying that it's better to make Demons surrender head on. The Dragon Knights won't have a problem with the miasma and things like that if they get protection."

Those who were strong and came from the Labyrinth were regarded as important, but there were no long, wide-scale wars in the Kingdom. Regardless of the Labyrinth, it probably couldn't be helped that the Knights' way of thinking had developed towards valuing honor, considering they bore the responsibility of guarding the Palace and the Capital. The Knights under direct command of the Palace probably thought of themselves as Elites...so it made sense that putting them with Magicians was like mixing water and oil.

The Knights failed to notice the kidnapping incident and the Demon's intrusion, and certainly they had made a mistake by not making it to the Demon's subjugation in time. After being left out of resolving the situation, they were probably outraged.

There were definitely ways to counter the miasma.
If it were the Knights, then it was probably possible to receive that support.
I was sure the Dragon Knights would compensate this disadvantage with aerial battles.

"Then, if you aren't bluffing, would you give me some advice on this?"

Chester said, with an irritated tone. If he could overpower me, who exchanged blows with Lynette using Skills, in close combat techniques, then it would be easy for him to destroy a Demon head on...was probably what he was getting at.

"I don't mind at all, you know. It's quicker to prove and show it by using our Skills, right? I'll accompany you for a bit in a mock battle, if we're done talking."

"Right now, with that appearance? You probably don't have a weapon."

...So?

He was probably misunderstanding something. There were practice spears with no spearheads leaning against the walls of the Underground Training Grounds. The spears were made of iron that stretched until their handles. In this mock battle...as long as it wasn't a Magic battle, this would be enough to be a substitute for a Staff. After putting a suitable practice spear in my hands, I said:

"And do you think a Demon would respect the state of one's equipment and weapons?"

"...Interesting. Will you swear to stay out of Palace affairs if I win?"

Perhaps this included our talk about Flight techniques. For the time being, it was unlikely that anyone who could rival the Dragon Knights would appear any time soon...and if I were to get involved in promoting myself here personally, I didn't know what would happen.

"That's fine. I didn't originally plan on quitting my job as an Adventurer at this point in time anyway. It will help me if you don't get involved in my various matters if I win."

“Very well.”

//

Chester also picked up a practice spear, and then we faced each other. Chester was indeed a Dragon Knight. He knew how to use a long-handled weapon even if the battle was on the ground.

Well, Chester appeared to hate weaknesses that were caused by Magic, and I thought that his skill would be acceptable if he could do something about a Demon’s Flight and their Miasma.

“I’ll start then?”

“Come.”

The instant I obtained his consent, I kicked the floor of the Training Grounds and closed the distance in one breath. Although the wide-eyed Chester tried to counter it, his reaction was slow. I propped the spear’s handle onto my knee to use it as a shield, in order to strike him with my body while deflecting his attack, and then I rammed him. Even if I didn’t infuse Mana into the spear and handled it roughly for a bit, it probably wouldn’t break.

“W-What!?”

Chester, who received this attack, stumbled and stared at me, wide-eyed. His reaction told me that he had not thought that he would retreat a step just from being pressured by a child.

What I showed just now was a warm up. This was a mock battle so I couldn’t use spells with high killing power, and I couldn’t infuse my weapon with Mana either. Therefore, I decided to strengthen my body with Circulation, performing the fundamentals of my battle skills.

Immediately after that, I grabbed the middle of my spear and stepped forward, unleashing an attack from both sides, like I was swinging an oar. Sounds of metal clashed as our iron spears struck each other. The current distance was the range I excelled in. Although we both had the same weapon equipped, the way I used it was different from the beginning. I engulfed Chester’s thrust and drove him away. Our positions rapidly changed places, as if we were dancing a rondo. Just as he got used to seeing the attacks from the side, I unexpectedly changed the trajectory, swinging downwards. I transitioned into a strike, as if I were going

to scoop him up.

“Ku!”

Although it didn’t finish him off and he blocked it with the back of his hand, Chester’s spear was left in his left hand, and he made a wide swing. I jumped backwards and avoided that strike.

“I won’t think of you as a brat any longer!”

Chester, who distanced himself from me, brandished his spear in a cowboy stance, and then his body and spear were enveloped in a blue aura. It was a martial arts skill, Meteor Thrust. Chester fiercely charged at me with his whole body while thrusting his spear.

“Naive.”

If I stuck to him and only defended, perhaps he would get impatient and give me the victory.

Although his Meteor Thrust certainly was fast, I had the theory that such a bold move would make their user lose their balance. Otherwise, they would suffer a severe blow.

Use a martial skill to deal with a martial skill. The Joujutsu skill, Sweeping Haze(霞払い).

The moment the tips of our spears touched each other, I changed the direction of his power. The sensation of his Aura and my Mana mixing was similar to that of riding on a rail and sliding on it. We switched stances at the same time and faced each other.

“What!?”

Chester’s body changed direction, and he ended up striking the wall of the Training Grounds.

“Guh!”

He nearly withstood it before he struck the wall. I approached him without any difficulties, and then I slashed at Chester’s chest with the spear. Although he blocked my spear at the last moment, he lost his balance. His body immediately bent over. While facing his side, I unleashed an attack and beat him down.

Chester received blows with condensed power in the form of a spiral, and he was blown towards the direction I wanted him to go. I pulled my spear away for a moment and gave him a low kick, and as he fell down, I thrusted my spear at his neck.

“_”

Just as I was about to stab his throat with the tip of my spear, I asked him:
“Do you admit your loss?”

“...Yeah.”

Chester nodded, looking frustrated.

“The only times I was dealt with this nicely was when I was receiving lessons... from Commander and Oswald-dono long ago.”

That was right. To explain it more clearly, our experience differed. Even if I said that my training was enhanced through BFO’s PvP system, it had accumulated through a massive amount of trial and error. Training normally couldn’t take you this far, and people fought above their limits. This was done every day and night, until one was satisfied. It was like asking what kind of skills one should attack with, where to attack, how to deal with a situation, what the enemy’s next move would be, and what the best card they had right now was.

Martial skills, Magic, and Items as well. I had learned to finish any kind of battle, and I took great pains in learning how to see cheesy and checkmate situations, and how to counterattack them. I had such a massive amount of experience and knowledge that, as long as my body kept up with this information with Circulation, I had no reason to lose easily.

“I certainly lost. However, I don’t think I am wrong. If you can go so far without using magic...isn’t playing petty tricks unnecessary with Demons as an opponent? If it’s you, that is.”

Thinking in such a way was an overestimation. The power of my Magic was displayed through close combat, and miasma bullets weren’t something that a physical body could endure. You would definitely die if you were devoured, so it

was necessary to approach them while preventing that situation.

“...I think it’s splendid for Lord Chester to attain Knighthood. However, I have my own way of fighting and my own opinions on how to face battles. I would like the freedom to fight as I choose.”

“...Those are?”

“I want to fight in a way where I can manipulate how my opponents move. Reading their position and thoughts, and then crushing them, is the way I really battle. That’s why, even if battles are like these matches or mock battles, I have no intention of changing the way I fight, regardless of winning against opponents with one’s true ability or being inferior to them. Especially when Demons are my opponents. Those things are even more disgusting.”

“What have the Demons...done to you?”

After seeing my expression, Chester raised his eyebrows, as if he had also remembered something.

“...Well, that was a good discussion. There aren’t any challengers, so I believe that you can keep a promise.”

Leaving the question unanswered, I glanced at the dumbfounded Chester out of the corner of my eye, and then left the Underground Training Grounds.

--